5
FINAL
Taro Hitsuji
ILLUSTRATION BY
Kiyotaka Haimura
LAST ROUND Arthurs
ONCE KING & FUTURE KING

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"To save the world! Let's head out!"
LUNA ARTUR
A high school girl trying to become the greatest king in the world. Wages war on King Arthur and leads an army of other candidates for the throne to save the planet.
LAST ROUND Arthurs
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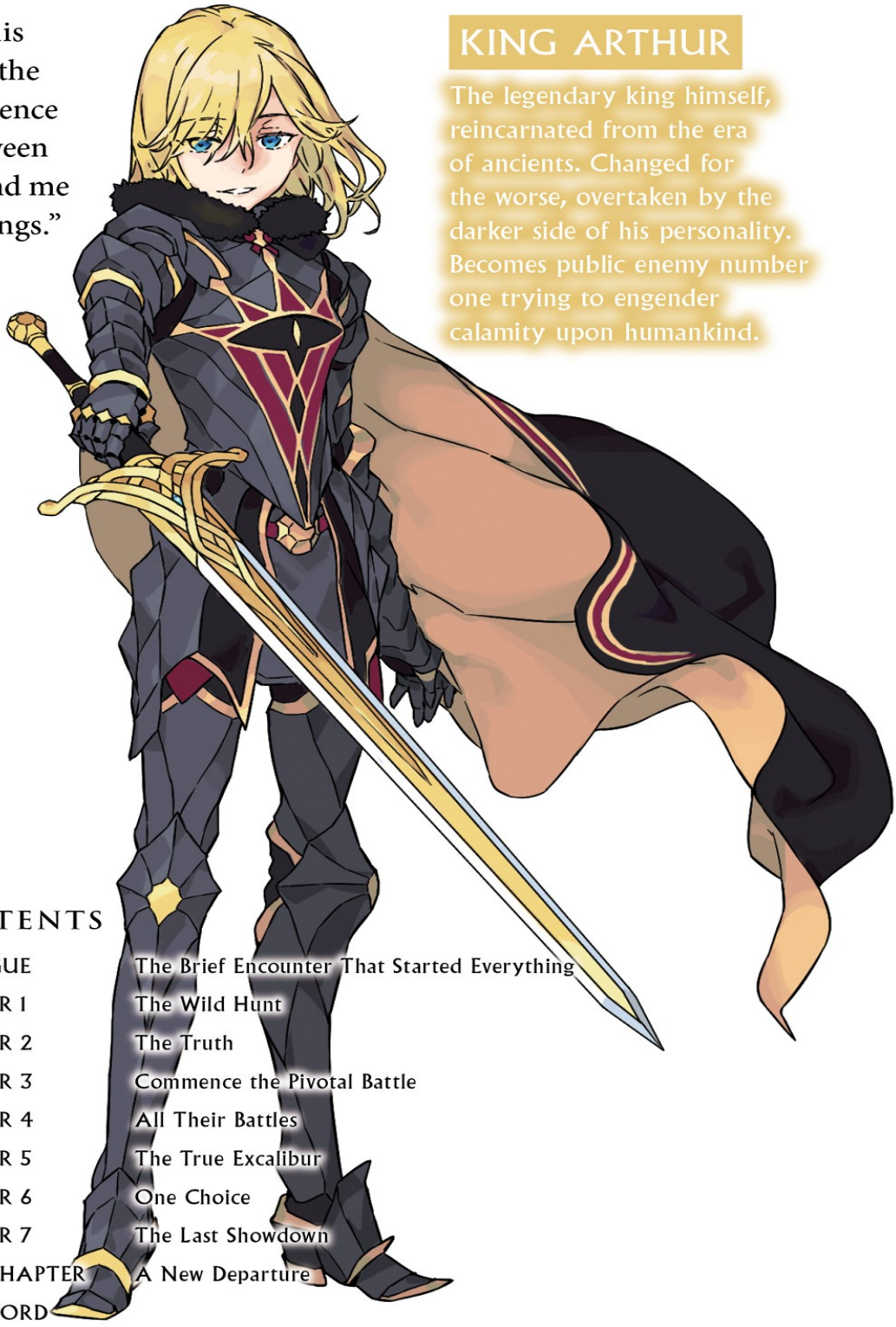
"This is…the difference between you and me as kings."



KING ARTHUR

The legendary king himself, reincarnated from the era of ancients. Changed for the worse, overtaken by the darker side of his personality. Becomes public enemy number one trying to engender calamity upon humankind.

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"I think I'd like to be a king who stands up, persistent, even from the mud."
FELICIA FERALD
Touched by everyone's raw emotions, abandons the pride that fettered her. Matures as a person and king.
"Don't think I'll play nice like before, now that I'm in this body..."
MORGAN LE FAY
A witch who joins hands with King Arthur to make a certain vision come to life. Unlocks her form as Queen Morrigan the Great—goddess of war—to stand in the way of Luna's group.
"We can't fall here... Don't die on us, Emma!"
EMMA MICHELLE
Dropped out of the King Arthur Succession Battle upon losing her Excalibur and Jack, but takes up her sword once more for a worldwide emergency. Rintarou's former disciple.
"Obviously! ...You know, *you* tried to kill me once yourself?"
SIR MORDRED
A Jack...and candidate for the throne. Decides to lend her powers to the battle with Rintarou.

RINTAROU MAGAMI
Reincarnation of Merlin. Was supposedly left in a netherworld to fight a battle to the death against Balor...
"...Didn't I tell you? I'm already the world's best vassal for the world's greatest king."
"...What?"
"That's why I'll always return to you. As many times as it takes."
"Rintarou...?"
"Yeah, it's me. Sorry I'm late."

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Taro Hitsuji

ILLUSTRATION BY
Kiyotaka Haimura

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Taro Hitsuji
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Over there is yesterday in all its radiance. Here is today, faded and colorless.

And tomorrow is bound in ashes.

We reached the dismal end of the play, of our dreams.

I watched it as the cold wind blew.

Yes, he was there among the Knights of the Round Table.

Together with the one they called strong, noble—the once and future king.

Be that as it may, their swords etched him into stone, disappearing into sand and verse.

Like a dream at dusk, like a mirage of a fleeting night.

I watched everything as I slumbered.

Watched as the cold wind blew.

John Sheep

FROM LAST ROUND ARTHUR

PROLOGUE

The Brief Encounter That Started Everything

King Arthur, fabled knight, the one to unite all of Britain.

Inside the opulent gardens of Castle Camelot, his residence, which was like a physical symbol of his power and authority…

"*Siiigh…* How boring…"

Under an open parasol, a young lady—beautifully dressed—rested on a garden chair. Her chin was propped up under her hand as she let out a sigh. Her black hair was radiant like obsidian, skin white as snow, features defined, body curvy. This striking girl went by the name Morgan le Fay. King Arthur's half sister.

"Boring, boring, boooring… I finally managed to sneak past my elder sisters and reincarnated for nothing."

Morgan looked out at the garden, uninterested, eyes clouded over. Light streamed down on the expansive grounds; bloomed flowers carpeted the garden plots, which staged trimmed shrubs, shapes arithmetically calculated. Lords and knights of all types would be overcome with emotion if they could chance upon the garden belonging to the great king, but it did nothing for Morgan.

She'd grown tired of it.

Called into this world by humanity and born in a nonhuman form, Morgan had become bored of her role as designated protector of the mortals. She'd thought reincarnating into a human shape and indulging in worldly pleasures might solve her woes. But even when she shed her duties as a keeper to scorn, control, tempt, fool, trap, and toy with humans, it just didn't do anything for her.

There was no fun to be had. Nothing was interesting. It left her feeling hollow. The world looked ashen to her, lacking in all color. Not that she would ever entertain the idea of devoting herself to her role without question like her two older sisters.

What was the point of a duty that had been thrust upon her?

She'd grown weary—or like she couldn't find any meaning in her own existence in this world.

"*Siiigh…* Boooring. Maybe I should just kill myself. Maybe I'll die and rejoin my sisters on the other side?"

Morgan kept sighing…and then she saw two knights in the distance walking down the garden path. Arthur, her half brother in the real world

and the king of Britain. And…a young knight, a fresh recruit to the Round Table.

Average looks, average military feats, average background. He neither excelled in domestic affairs like Sir Kay nor negotiated well like Sir Dinadan. His most defining characteristic was that he had none.

"I recall his name was…"

To a striking, high-class lady such as Morgan, he was a human weed. The knight was conferring closely with King Arthur. Come to think of it, this wasn't the first time she'd seen this. It seemed King Arthur trusted this average knight.

"Hmm?" Morgan watched him, indifferent…until a beguiling smile crept onto her face. She stood up.

If Arthur's trusted knight had an affair with his older sister… Hee-hee-hee… I'd love to see the look on Arthur's face. Maybe I'll stop being so bored.

This had been Morgan's motive at the time.

When you get used to extravagant meals at the palace, you start to crave junk food… I imagine even someone boring can keep me entertained for a night.

She was just going to flirt with him.

Morgan gloated as she stealthily followed King Arthur and his knight. She waited until he was alone, and then she called out to him. "…Yoo-hoo. Excuse me, you gorgeous specimen."

She smiled, lavishing him with her wiles and grace that had bewitched many men.

"I must admit…I've wanted to approach you for a very long time. Won't you talk with me? Please, Sir Accolon…"

"S-sure…? You want to talk to *me…*?"

That knight—Sir Accolon—blinked at Morgan.

This was the first encounter between Morgan and Sir Accolon, the most ordinary knight of them all.

CHAPTER 1

The Wild Hunt

“Wh-what’s happening?!” Luna shouted.

They had just completed the quest for the Holy Grail, narrowly escaping the clutches of Balor, and returned from the illusory world to the real world.

This was the first thing out of Luna’s mouth.

They were at a Gate on the outskirts of the harbor in Area Nine—the starting point of the quest—on the artificial island of New Avalon. But the state of the town was completely different from how they left it.

They almost feared World War III had broken out, upon seeing the state of Avalonia, the international city. Rows of high-rises and houses had taken a hit, some completely caved in. Flames and smoke curled in the sky all over town. There were cracks in the road, asphalt turned up to expose the ground, cars rammed into buildings, trains derailed and flipped over. In this half-destroyed state, it wasn’t hard to imagine that city infrastructure was not holding up.

Plus, weaving through the ruins were apparitions, apparitions, apparitions…which were usually contained by the Curtain of Consciousness and shouldn’t have taken on an organic form in the real world. They were presently sauntering around, however, as though they owned the place.

It was dusk. The golden red glare of the setting sun seemed to suggest the world was ending.

And what was worth mentioning most of all…

“What *is* that…?” Luna squinted to look into the distance—toward Area One of Avalonia, the center of this artificial island and the nucleus that presided over the city infrastructure.

She could clearly see the silhouette of a towering castle—inordinately large. So large, in fact, that she could see it from this distance. It was a mountain of a building and ink black, like darkness itself.

The castle, however, was misshapen as if missing pieces, but it was currently constructing itself at a meteoric rate… At least, that was her best guess.

It went without saying that it wasn’t there before they’d left. It had kind of just materialized when they’d returned.

“What happened…?!” Luna shrieked. “Don’t tell me we spent all of eternity in the illusory world!”

“Th-there’s no way…” Nayuki shook her head. “I was filled in about your quest on our way back…and your time there should have been the briefest of moments…”

“It shouldn’t be more than three days,” said Sir Kay. “But this is…” She couldn’t contain her panic, staring at the transformed town, unseeing.

“…It’s the Wild Hunt,” murmured Sir Galahad, looking grim at the rear of the group.

“What’s that?”

“In the East, it’s called the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, I think. *Someone* is leading a hunting party composed of all kinds of apparitions, fairies, and spirits of the dead to race through the skies… Luna, do you know about this legend?”

“K-kinda… I think I’ve heard of a folktale that’s been passed down across Europe…?” Luna answered, riffling through her hazy memories.

It had to be a Wild Hunt if there were wandering goblins, wights, imps, and black dogs—all apparitions infamous in Europe from ages past.

“W-wait a second, Sir Galahad! You don’t mean the Wild Hunt is happening, right?!”

“I do.” Sir Galahad pointed at the arcane castle in the distance. “These apparitions are heading to that castle, where dwells a certain *someone* who can lead the Wild Hunt… Basically, Balor’s scheme—involving the King Arthur Succession Battle—has come to pass.”

“What does that even mean?! Start from the beginning!” Luna shouted, no clue as to what was happening.

“…Unfortunately…” Sir Galahad lifted a lance above her head and whipped it around like a whirlwind.

In the next instant, they could sense apparitions around them. As soon as they came into view, Sir Galahad released a shock wave from her spear that obliterated them indiscriminately. They didn’t even try to reform, melting into puffs of mana and disappearing.

“We don’t have time to talk about specifics right now. They see us as prey.”

“…?!”

With Sir Galahad going on the offensive, the others readied themselves to cover one another’s backs. They could sense more apparitions coming closer, before bursting into existence, surrounding them: Redcaps, aged and small, donning red hats. Ogres with their bulging muscles and ugly mugs. Child-size goblins appearing from nowhere. Giants, emerging from the buildings’ shadows. Winged gargoyles swooping in from the sky. Shaggy bugbear sprites, looking wicked, crawling out of the earth.

Apparitions that had been passed down in legends throughout Europe were advancing on them in waves.

“What…? Why are there so many apparitions in the first place?!” Luna readied her Excalibur. “Doesn’t the Curtain of Consciousness separate the real world and the illusory world?! I thought it was impossible for them to come into this world, except in small batches!”

“The Catastrophe is upon us,” Sir Galahad said gravely.

The apparitions attacked, crashing down on them repeatedly. The group was terribly outnumbered. At this rate, they'd be crushed, Luna assumed, freezing on reflex.

"Hah!" Sir Galahad had launched herself off the ground, a step ahead of them, and twirled around her sword and spear. This was probably what could be called a one-hit KO.

The impact shook the island. With just a sword and a spear, she had split that apparition tsunami in half, scattering them into the air.

"*Excuse* me…?" Luna grumbled as she saw Sir Galahad display a fraction of her inhuman strength.

Sir Galahad remained calm. "Luna, head to the castle. We don't have time to talk, but…all we can do is defeat a certain *someone* who's going to control this Wild Hunt and stand at its helm. You need to get into that castle and conquer the leader!"

"…"

"If they can pull off the Wild Hunt and tear through the world, they'll obliterate the Curtain of Consciousness and trigger the Catastrophe! Before that happens—," Sir Galahad appealed to Luna.

"Got it! So that black castle is the source… I felt that was the case! Let's go, guys!" Luna dashed forward, taking the vanguard. Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad ran after her.

Luna paused for a second and turned around. She thought for a fleeting moment about the boy she adored who had risked his life to send them back here.

"…Rintarou," she murmured, staring out into the ocean horizon, red under the evening sun.

As if trying to shake something off, she turned around and started running.

—

MM-DD-YYYY

Avalonia chief of police, Yoichi Saitou, reporting in.

Right now, chaos has befallen the international city of Avalonia. It started on MM-DD, early dawn. Creatures—monsters, I guess—started to appear around Area Nine of New Avalon, creating mass destruction. Source is yet to be confirmed. Then, the same thing happened in Area Seven, Area Two, Area Five, Area Six…everywhere on the island. Cause still unknown.

Our external communications have been severed. It doesn't feel real. All attempts to contact the Japanese government—phones, telegrams, Internet, etc.—have failed. No clue why.

An enormous black castle has been erected in Area One. We are at a loss here.

Monsters from European folklore are attacking us—buildings and people. The damage done is unimaginable. Number of casualties unknown. Still unable to confirm any details about the situation.

MM-DD-YYYY

We've attempted to exterminate the monsters but haven't even made a dent. Ordinary firearms are unable to kill even one of these goblins, it seems. It's not even that. People at the scene have reported that guns are fundamentally ineffective. The creatures might be operating on different planes of existence.

I doubt we can fight them even with our best firearms. Our SWAT team has sustained damage from the earlier battle. Our organization is lacking power. According to reports, children armed with swords and knights in old-fashioned armor have been fighting the creatures and protecting the citizens, but those are rumors. What good could a sword do to these monsters if they're invincible against firearms?

MM-DD-YYYY

All our essential facilities—energy plants, water treatment plants, transit infrastructure, news outlets—have been destroyed by the creatures, leaving us no choice but to cease operations.

There's no light out there, like we've returned to the Dark Ages.

MM-DD-YYYY

Next to go are the train and subway lines. Citizens trying to flee by car have found that the main streets are packed with vehicles—some abandoned—causing a bottleneck. We're stuck.

We don't have options. Emergency headquarters are panicking.

As the SWAT team, we've devoted our lives to evacuating citizens to sea, the only route left, but we've failed to escape the island. For causes unknown, whenever our ships are cast into the sea, their passengers are surrounded by mist, lose consciousness, and wake up at the harbor. Based on that, I hypothesize outside rescue efforts would never be able to get to this island. I can't tell my people that. They've been waiting for help.

It's unbelievable. We're trapped on this island with these creatures, like some B-list fantasy or sci-fi movie.

MM-DD-YYYY

The monsters have formed groups and are on the prowl. They seem to have some sort of goal or purpose. Based on their behavior, I've been calling this phenomenon the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons because it reminds me of the old Japanese legend.

Luckily, it seems they aren't going out of their way to attack people who have set up camp in buildings and are keeping silent. Seems we're safe as long as we are indoors. There may be fewer civilian losses than I thought. You know, the same thing happened in those legends…even though it's a made-up tale to discourage children from roaming outside at night.

It's only a matter of time before the island citizens are doomed. All necessary utilities have been cut off. The town is at the mercy of the monsters. We've been cowering from fear, knowing there will be no help.

We have no way out, and there is nothing we can do. Will we starve to death, go mad, or be eaten by the creatures first?

We took our world for granted. We never realized it was so frail.

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Please save us. Someone. Anyone.
An account found at the site of the former police station of Avalonia, demolished now.

—

"Hraaaaaaaah!" The sword came down, flashing.

"Gaaaaah!" cried out a creature, using its last breath. A flabby man—a troll—had been split into two.

"Hah!" After slicing through the troll with her Excalibur, Luna landed on the ground, catlike, as the troll dissolved into particles of mana. "…Hey, you! Over there! Are you okay?!"

"Aaah… Aaaaah…," whimpered a little girl, cowering on top of a mountain of roadside rubble.

Luna sheathed her sword and turned to her. "You're not supposed to be here—much less leave your house!" Luna scolded. "You're safer at home from these apparitions. Didn't your mom tell you? 'Don't go outside at night if you don't want to get eaten by monsters.'"

The girl looked down. "B-but…I need some water…" She was carrying an empty plastic jug in her trembling hands. "My mom's sick… And we have no water, food, or medicine… We really need water, at least…"

"Oh. You're looking for water for your mom… You're such a good kid." Nayuki crouched to eye level before whispering something and touching the jug. "…Here."

"Ack!" At some point, her bottle was brimming with clear water.

"I added some healing properties to it, so your mom should feel better," Nayuki said.

"Hmm? Oh, right, you're a water fairy!" Luna cried before turning to the girl. "Anyway! We solved your problem, so we need to get you home! Where is it?"

"…Th-thank you…"

Luna carried the girl on her back, taking her to the front yard of her house. It seemed like it had sustained less damage compared to the areas nearby. Maybe fewer apparitions were around. Luna could sense, however, that its residents were holding their breaths inside, taking shelter in their homes out of fear, and it hurt her heart.

"Tsk, we're heading out, guys." Luna turned around after she took the girl home…

"H-hey, miss…," blurted out the little girl, just as Luna had been about to leave.

"What?"

"Is there no saving us…? Will we be eaten by monsters…?" She cradled her bottle. "If we're doomed…even if I have water… *Sniffle*…"

It was like the adrenaline had worn off. Her shoulders heaved as she started to weep.

“It’ll be fine!” Luna assured. “I’m going to do something about it!”

“Huh?” She lifted her teary eyes and saw Luna, chest puffed up, inflated with confidence, expression as radiant as the sun.

“I’ll fix this joke! I’ll reclaim our serene town! After all, I’m the king who will rule over the world!”

The girl blinked her eyes, mystified. “You’re a king, miss…?”

“Uh-huh! I’m a king! I’m *the* king! In exchange for praise and words of affirmation, kings have a duty to protect our people! And I’m the real king! So I’ll protect you, your mom, and everyone else in this town!”

“…?!”

“Just hang in there! I know it’s tough because things are scary right now, but…stay put at home with your mom! Got that?!”

As if Luna’s confidence had rubbed off on her, the little girl wiped away her tears and cracked a tiny smile. “…Got it… I believe in you!” she cried, rushing back into her home.

Sir Galahad started to snicker. “If you want to fix this situation faster, we need to get to the castle… No detours. We don’t have time for you to keep stopping for just about anyone, Luna.”

“What? Have something to say?” Luna scowled, pinning a glare on Sir Galahad. “So maybe a real king should turn away from some sacrifices and head toward the castle… But I can’t do that. How can I call myself a king if I neglect commoners seeking my help?”

“…”

“Rintarou isn’t looking for a stereotypical king. He wants to serve someone who would stay true to herself—no matter what! ‘Proper’ kings can suck it—*I* want to become a king who swings her sword for all I care about. Being prim and proper takes a back seat!”

Sir Galahad apologized, backtracking. “Oh, sorry! Sorry! I gave you the wrong idea. I’m not trying to put you down, Luna. I like that you’re too kind to abandon anyone. I love that I’ve become your Jack, but—”

“…But what?” Luna kept glaring at her.

Sir Galahad took a big breath. “It’s just strange… I wonder what’s the difference between you and King Arthur?”

“…?” Luna tilted her head, visibly confused.

“Don’t think too hard about it.” Sir Kay patted Luna on the back, sighing. “Um, you see, Sir Galahad is an eccentric character…and enjoys her cryptic riddles. Don’t dwell on it.”

“…” Luna went silent.

Cryptic riddles in the middle of this situation? Sir Kay was right: They didn’t have time to worry about these things. At the same time, however, Luna felt like it might be important. She looked at Sir Galahad, trying to get clues, but the knight just stared back with a gentle smile.

Now isn’t the time to think about this…

Luna switched gears, about to run toward the castle again…

“—Awoooooooooooooooooo—…”

From a certain direction, they heard a terrific howl that sounded like thirty hounds baying at their prey. That was followed by a delayed vibration as if a powerful quadrupedal thing were storming forward. Their hairs stood on end, even though it was too far to see, and they trembled under its invisible force. The howl had even frightened the apparitions around them.

“Wh-what was that just now…?” asked Sir Kay, quivering.

“An apparition, obviously. But…it’s not any regular one.” Luna’s forehead beaded in sweat. “I can feel it, even though it’s so far off… I think it’s different from all the other ones until now. And the only thing I can tell is…”

“—Awoooooooooooooooooo—…”

It howled again loudly.

With a boom, the silhouette of the building they could see in the distance had been blasted as if in a demolition. Whatever that thing was, it was destroying the town far away.

“If we leave that be, the city will be beyond repair.”

“You’re right, Luna. Staying put at home isn’t going to be the right strategy against it,” Sir Galahad said.

“You know something about the thing that’s there?”

“It’s…the incarnation of violence and chaos, symbolizing the collapse of King Arthur’s kingdom. Unavoidable like a natural disaster, a dreadful threat to humankind.”

“…Hunh. Sounds dangerous.”

“What will you do, Luna?” Sir Galahad asked, as if testing her.

Luna didn’t hesitate. “Head over, obviously! We can’t let it keep going! There’s no way!”

Without waiting for a reply, she started running toward the demolished buildings. Sir Kay and Nayuki followed.

“And that’s exactly what makes her our king in this era.” Sir Galahad seemed satisfied as she watched Luna from behind. “…*You* might be able to stop him.”

Sir Galahad picked up speed, running like the wind.

Area Two of Avalonia. The business quarter—and currently, hell.

“—Awoooooooooooooooooo—…”

A single beast dominated over the area with an iron fist. A snake’s head and tail, a leopard’s torso, a lion’s haunches, a hart’s legs. The grotesque creature could drive a human mad simply by looking at them.

The thing, large like a skyscraper, moved in an agile way that seemed impossible given its size. It struck the earth with its four legs, ramming into the surrounding buildings at random, lashing out its tail, slashing with claws and fangs, dedicating itself to destroying the town.

The buildings collapsed, one after another. The people hiding indoors, holding their breath until then, were now starting to panic. They scattered, trying to flee from the site. The main street of Area Two was swarming with people.

In the middle of the city where the beast rampaged…a battle to the death was currently underway. It was the beast against the Kings.

“Hraaaaaah!”

Felicia leaped into the air, readying her Excalibur, and kicked off other buildings to gain height, using their walls as footholds. She came up over the beast’s head.

“Hyaaaaaaaaah!” Using her momentum, she used the weight of her entire body to bring down her sword into the forehead of the beast’s serpentine head. *Ga-shing!*

The tip of her sword, however, didn’t even puncture its skin by a fraction of an inch.

Felicia was flicked away.

“Awooooooooooooooo!” It shook its head as if trying to drive away a fly. Felicia was batted away like a baseball.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah?!”

“Curse you! My liege—!” Sir Gawain attempted to land a blow into its torso.

“Geez… I didn’t think this beast would be so annoying!” Sir Palamedes tried to slice through its leg, moving impossibly fast.

“Hmph. Older men like me aren’t too good with this stuff!” Sir Dinadan brought down his sword on its back, just for good measure.

Even the combo attack of Jacks, whose power exceeded that of humans—*Crash! Shing!*—showed no sign of injuring the beast’s body.

“Guh!” The monster swung its tail and forefeet, taking advantage of the moment.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah?!”

“Gaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Sir Gawain and Sir Dinadan were whacked away, defeated by its mass and violence. After crashing into a high-rise building, Sir Palamedes tumbled across the ground, seemingly forever.

“We’re not done yet! Royal Road—Sword of Destruction!” Reika Tsukuyomi—Sir Mordred—shouted, unlocking her Excalibur’s powers, causing a cluster of silver daggers like a meteor shower to rain down on the monster.

“Haaaaaaah!” Misha fired off her Excalibur in the shape of an assault gun, bullets bursting into flames to burn the beast. However…

“Gah… It doesn’t even look like it’s in pain…!”

“We need to keep going! Don’t stop firing…!” Sir Mordred shouted, continuing her attack. Misha let loose her barrage of fire.

It didn’t hurt the monster in the least. The peashooter was nothing more than a nuisance.

“Awooooooooooo!” The beast turned toward the sky and howled, scraping its paw against the ground two, three times. Then it charged furiously at Sir Mordred and Misha.

“What?!”

“Get back!” Someone had jumped in front of them.

Sir Percival. He gripped a spear.

“Flash of my spear, pierce through all…” He lifted his weapon overhead and started to twirl it, filling it with Aura.

It was the same type of technique used by Sir Tristan, who materialized his archery skills into an artifact called the Waste Not Bow. Sir Percival had his own method with his spear. He had been secretly charging his spear with his skills, which were extolled to be unbeatable.

“Klingsor!” He bent his arms, winding them up, to convert it into ballistic energy.

Sir Percival released the spear from his hands, and it turned into a silvery white laser beam, aimed straight at the muzzle of the beast that charged at them. It must have been the fastest technique among the knights of the Round Table. Its power: extraordinary. There was no way that the monster would be able to dodge it.

It landed its blow—a direct strike. The Aura concentrated into the spear formed an aurora as it detonated.

Is it over?! For a moment, they all expected that this was the end of it… but the dust storm cleared, allowing the beast to come out again. It didn’t slow down as it charged at Sir Percival.

“Aaaah…?!” This time, they were the ones who didn’t have time to run.

“Gaaaaaaah?!”

“Aaaaaaaah?!”

The monster was relentless as it barreled right into them, knocking away Misha, Sir Mordred, and Sir Percival like leaves. Their fight—even with Kings and Jacks—could hardly be called a battle…

“Ah…ah…Sir Percival…” The one King who couldn’t join the fight, Nanami Kuonji, could only watch, panicking.

“Gah… What…what should we do…?” Felicia dropped her head, covered in cuts. “How…can we beat that monster…?!”

“F-Felicia! Hang in there!” A petite girl sprinted over to Felicia. A former King—Emma. She had joined Felicia during this crisis.

Emma used a *Healing* spell on Felicia’s wounds, but it was just a drop in the bucket.

“I’m sorry, Emma… We’ve dragged you into this battle, even though you’ve lost your Jack and Excalibur…”

“It’s all right. If there’s anything I can do… Anyway, what is that monster?”

“Not sure… All I know is that it’s the final calamity that will ruin this island…”

Behind them, people were running for their lives, chased out by the rampaging monster. The Kings and Jacks were managing to distract the beast for the most part, but they couldn’t keep that up forever. In a few hours, they would be too exhausted to fight, and then the beast would

trample everyone and destroy this very city—until there was nothing to destroy any longer.

The international city of Avalonia housed over five hundred thousand people. The casualties would be…catastrophic.

"…What should we do, Felicia Ferald…?" Sir Mordred asked, ragged and supporting Misha, who was slumped over on her shoulder. She touched down next to Felicia. "We need to leave the front line to the Jacks for now… and come up with a plan."

"…" Felicia just went silent.

Felicia, Sir Gawain, Sir Mordred, Misha, Sir Palamedes, Sir Percival… and even Emma had exhausted their power to fight. Any countermeasures in their arsenal had already been attempted.

Since the artificial island had been turned into a netherworld, cut off from outside, they knew there wouldn't be reinforcements… Then again, real firearms were ineffective against those monsters, which were from the illusory world, so reinforcements would mean nothing anyway.

In any event, they could see no means of escape. Like ants against a dragon, they couldn't defeat the monster. The Kings had no way to beat back the beast.

"…Ha-ha…ha-ha-ha… It's over, huh?"

And that was when it happened.

One of the Kings participating in the King Arthur Succession Battle, Misha, dropped to her knees.

"How stupid… I risked everything for this, and the King Arthur Succession Battle ends up being a bunch of hooey… You call this a fight to select the real King? You call this a treasure hunt…? Rot in hell, Dame du Lac…," Misha grumbled.

Felicia grabbed her collar. "This isn't the time to complain, Misha Zaturina! It makes my blood boil, too, thinking that we were deceived. But we've got to fight for the people now—"

"Can't you see, Felicia Ferald?! This is where it ends!" Misha snapped back even louder. "We can't win against that thing! We're going to die! This island is going to be annihilated! That thing destroyed the kingdom, and we'll never win against it! The Catastrophe will unfold… The world is ending! We can't defy fate!"

"B-but…!" *Gshnk.* Felicia clenched her jaw as if punishing herself and glared at Misha. "We must fight, regardless! Because we're kings!"

"Huh… You're still trying to succeed King Arthur…? Even after you've seen *that* horrific thing? Ha-ha-ha. You're so naive…"

"N-no… I'm trying to say it has to do with who we are, and…!" Felicia tried to convince Misha on something that they couldn't agree on…

"Awooooooooo!" A howl shook the sky, like an auditory arrow piercing through heaven.

They could see the beast shaking off the Jacks who clung to it like mosquitos…and then its eyes met Felicia's. Pawing at the ground thrice like a boar, it started to stampede toward them.

Its mass barreled toward the Kings as if trying to run them over. The earth thundered under its weight.

"Ah… We've got to run…!" Felicia tried to brace her legs.

…Slump. But they wouldn't move, because she hadn't completely recovered yet.

"…Gah?!"

"Ah, Felicia?! D-don't hurt yourself…!" Emma lent Felicia her shoulder.

"You shouldn't lag behind! You won't be able to escape while supporting me!"

"B-but…!" Emma looked around. Nanami was frozen in fear, and Sir Mordred had been rendered immobile from blood loss after fighting on the front lines with the Jacks.

"…Ha-ha. It's over…," Misha said, giving up, hanging her head, and dropping to her knees.

"D-dammit… After we've come so far…! Curse this frail human body of mine…!" Sir Mordred clutched her dagger-shaped Excalibur, hand shaking, and pointed its tip at the charging beast.

"S-Sir Mordred! You can't use your Royal Road again…!" Felicia called out. She couldn't let her die, even though they'd once been enemies.

To begin with, their Excaliburs were nothing compared to the beast.

"But we need to do something…! I might have made mistakes in the past, but I…!"

Sir Mordred unleashed her final Royal Road.

The daggers rained down on its muzzle, scarcer and slower than before. And sure enough, they didn't help to slow its charge.

"…" Sir Mordred, watching the beast, lowered her arms in disappointment.

They were fated for ruin. Several seconds later, the beast would ram into them…and everything would be done. Time seemed to pass slowly as they headed toward death…

Felicia started to dissociate, feeling as though she wasn't even there.

…Is it over? Is this how it ends…? It didn't feel real, but this was reality.

I was betrayed by my aspirations… I couldn't even protect anything I wanted to protect… The world is reaching its ruin… Is this how the story ends…?

It was reality, unmistakably. A truly terrible one. The beast before them made that clear.

Its maddened eyes seemed to be telling something to Felicia: Accept it and give up.

Oh, but…that means… Felicia's entire body started to go limp.

"My liege?! Felicia! Please, please run— Gah!"

She could hear her Jack let out a little shriek from somewhere, but it meant nothing to her.

…Is this…the end…of everything…? Her Excalibur slowly slipped from Felicia's hand…

At that time…Felicia, Emma, Misha, Sir Mordred, Nanami…Sir Gawain, Sir Palamedes, Sir Dinadan, Sir Percival… All faced the same thing: despair and resignation.

They wished they could abandon everything and be at ease, captive by their negativity. Though their hearts rejected that this was the end, their instincts screamed they needed to surrender to the final charge of the beast, which was fear incarnate.

What gripped the air was hopelessness—pure hopelessness.

That was when something happened.

"Protect, Lahat Chereb—the Flaming Sword!"

Flames radiating crimson burst around them, forming a fiery vortex that served as a barricade against the beast. But it was just fire, after all. They assumed it wouldn't do anything…

"Awoooooooo?!" The monster, unscathed from the attacks of the knights of the Round Table and withstanding the Excaliburs…stopped its charge in front of these flames, of all things. It reared up onto its front legs, trying to escape…as if genuinely afraid of the fire.

"…Huh?! Why?!" Felicia opened her eyes wide…

"Collect ice spirits and lightly dance!"

In front of her, snow stormed around the beast, forming icicles that sharpened into lances and assaulted the monster. *Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.* They *pierced* its body, which sprayed blood. But it was far from a fatal wound.

"Awooooooooo?!" Its first taste of pain frightened the beast, making it halt in its tracks.

In that instant, a girl in white raced past Felicia, charging at the cowering monster, and leaped, using her momentum to fly through the air. She brought down the sword and spear in her hands, crossing them and coming down on its head.

"Hraaaaaaaah!" It sounded like a construction demolition had been set off, booming several miles through the surroundings.

The attack leveraged by the slender arms of the girl in white sent the beast soaring like a joke…and capsized it.

Zwoosh… As it slowly flipped upside down, the impact jolted the artificial island up several feet. The unsightly four legs of the beast started to writhe.

"Huh…? What's happening…?" Misha opened her eyes wide in disbelief. "Is that the same beast that we didn't have a chance against, even when we worked together…?"

It wasn't just Misha. All were reeling in shock that the beast had been driven back. Above them, on top of a crumbling building…

"How could you just give up?! All of you!"

There was a girl smiling smugly down at them. They all looked at her, surprised.

It was—

“Luna?!”

“You can’t give up, just because you’re feeling a little hopeless! This cinches it… We all know which of us is most fit to be king! There’s no competition!” Luna monologued before jumping down from the building.

When Felicia watched Luna soar down like a war maiden, she could feel tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

“Y-you’re okay, Luna…? You’re late… *So* late—aaaaaah?!”

Crash! Luna had landed right on Felicia, effectively squishing her.

“Hmph! Weaklings, all of you! You don’t have any idea what makes a king a king! A ruler can’t feel hopeless when protecting their subjects! If you’ve got the time for hanging your heads, then lean on your swords, stand back up, and figure out a way to escape from the battle!”

“…Um…I know you’re on a roll, but you’re kind of crushing Felicia…,” Sir Mordred murmured, looking unimpressed.

“Wha—?! Felicia?! Ack?! How could the beast…?! How dare you do this to my good friend Felicia…! I’ll never forgive you!”

“…Um, it was all you.”

“I’ll fight any enemy of Felicia’s!”

“You know what? I’m just not going to say anything.”

Luna seemed fired up with righteous indignation, clutching onto Felicia, who was slumped over, eyes rolled to the back of her head. Sir Mordred just looked away.

“‘Heal, heal, blessed rain,’” quietly chanted another girl—not Luna.

Gentle drops of glittering rain showered over the area. It healed their battle-weary bodies and replenished lost strength.

“I-is this…the power of the Holy Grail…? No, it feels similar, but…”

“Such amazing healing properties… It’s so different from Felicia’s powers and my own.”

Sir Mordred and Emma caught the raindrops in their hands, curious.

“Good job, Nayuki! Seems like you got stronger after you were revived by the Holy Grail, huh? Can the chalice do that? Well, whatever! Getting a boost after respawning is, like, a given, I guess!”

“Huh… You’re always so quick to come up with your own explanations, Luna.”

“Ah-ha-ha. What do you expect?” Nayuki asked.

Sir Kay and Nayuki softly landed next to Luna…

“’Sup, Luna? I fended off that thing, but I didn’t defeat it. Don’t let your guard down. It’ll get back on its feet in no time.”

Zwoosh! The girl in white who had managed that—Sir Galahad—leaped down by Luna’s side.

“Good going, vassals!” Luna stuck up her chest and broke out into a smug grin once she was surrounded by such reliable company. Seeing her, Sir Gawain, Sir Dinadan, Sir Palamedes, and Felicia, who had been healed by the rain, and even Sir Percival blinked in surprise.

Misha barked at Luna. “I can’t believe you’re back alive…! Luna Artur, do you mean to tell me that you succeeded in the impossible search for the Holy Grail?!”

“Ha! I did the impossible!”

“You’re joking… There’s no way we could do something even King Arthur himself hasn’t been able to accomplish…”

“Your loser mentality—that you can’t do something he couldn’t do—shows how I’m qualified to be king, and you’re not!” Luna said brusquely, disregarding Misha’s comment. “Anyway! For…reasons, I tossed the Holy Grail after I got my hands on it! But I’ve got Sir Kay, who was selected by the sword of the most excellent knight! And Nayuki, who apparently absorbed part of the Holy Grail’s powers after being revived by it! And most importantly…”

Bwish! Luna pointed at Sir Galahad. “…This one became my new Jack, swearing loyalty to me. The thirteenth seat of the Round Table, Sir Galahad! Undeniable proof that I’ve been successful on the quest! How’s that?!”

“Ah-ha-ha… Hello, Percival and all my senior knights… It’s been a while.” Sir Galahad scratched her cheek, bashful.

“No way…! Galahad the immaculate paladin…!”

“Is it really you, the seat of peril…?!”

“But I thought you weren’t at Camlann Hill, off in the town of Sarras delivering the Holy Grail to heaven…”

The Jacks started to stir.

“Anyway, that’s the story!” Luna concluded. “I’ve outstripped all the Kings to become the most powerful one of you. Capisce? Bwah-ha-ha!”

“Um…but, Luna, it wasn’t you who did any of the changing… How can you look so smug…?”

“A vassal’s power is her king’s power.”

“Right. Riiiight.” Sir Kay’s eyes glazed over. She was giving up.

“All right! All of you! Get up! Now that the strongest and rightful king has returned, it’ll all be right! We’ll strike back! We’re saving the world! Now come with me!” Luna stood in front of them, hauling her sword majestically as she encouraged them.

Even when she was up against this almighty monster, she showed no fear. It might seem unreasonable and strange, but she looked like a king who would stand at the peak of humanity, lead people, and face any hardship. When the group saw her, they felt like they were on an emotional roller coaster—from despair to hope.

Misha snipped spitefully at Luna. “I—I don’t accept that! I won’t put up with someone like you!”

“*Siiigh.* You love to bark, huh, Russia? We already know I’m a better king than you, so zip it and follow my lead.”

“Grr! You can only say that because you haven’t gone against it!”

“All right, all right. You’re such a sore loser, dude.” Luna shrugged and broke into a smile, but Misha refused to back down.

“I… No, *we* wouldn’t kneel for a beast or give up, even if you’re more powerful than us!”

“But you already have. What are you—the punchline to some joke?”

“No! You’ve got it wrong! You don’t get it since you’ve only just arrived! There’s *someone* behind that beast!”

“?!”

Now that Misha made that point, their hope dissolved back into misery again, faces instantly clouding.

“…Hmm? No…I guess *that’s what’s happening*, huh?” Luna had inferred it, more or less.

And then she noticed something: The monster hadn’t tried to attack them again. She looked at the beast…that had fallen back, kneeling as if in awe of something.

It had turned toward…three human silhouettes who had appeared out of nowhere. A young boy knight flanked by two older knights.

The armor and mantle of the boy knight was jet-black—deep, dark, the color of shadows, like peering into the abyss itself. Something about his form and features shared a striking resemblance to Luna’s. He was blond, blue-eyed, and about the same age as she was. They had the same hair and eye color. He was a slender, handsome boy who might be mistaken for Luna’s sibling or distant relative.

If Luna could be described as gold that was as brilliant as the sun, he was the color gold, too, but the kind that absorbed light. He was no ordinary person.

Even if she didn’t know anything about the situation, her very soul understood his overwhelmingness, his imposing presence. Her eyes wouldn’t leave his sword—one that he held in both hands and thrust into the ground.

“…That sword is…?!”

It was neither silver nor gold, forged from a curious metal. Free of any tarnish, the blade shone brighter than thirty torches. The treasured sword was peak artistry, and it hadn’t lost any of the functionality as a simple blade. Luna’s and the other kings’ swords couldn’t even compare.

It was the strongest sword, divine and devilish. Celebrated across the world, this blade had the inscription of the *Slashing Sword*—the greatest king's sword, known to slash through anything that existed.

"…Looks like the general himself has come to greet us, Luna," Sir Galahad noted solemnly to Luna, who had frozen in place, chilled to the core. "Yeah. He's…the master of that *Dark Castle Camelot…* He's the king."

Castle Camelot. The master. The king. According to Sir Galahad.

In all of history and in all the lands, there had only been one master of Castle Camelot.

Why hadn't she realized this until now?

The Wild Hunt. The Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, a hunting party consisting of apparitions and sprites from all eras and places, along with the spirits of the dead.

According to European legends, the one to stand at the helm and lead that hunting party was…

"Hey! I guess there was one more heir I hadn't met face-to-face yet… You seem different from the other kids…so I thought I'd come to give you a proper greeting."

Luna didn't understand why, but she was certain of something when she looked at the boy knight. Her soul knew it was the truth, which allowed her to accept reality.

"Nice to meet you. My name is…"

"King Arthur…! Our forefather…!" Luna yelled before he could name himself.

The boy—King Arthur—looked at Luna and smiled.

"N-no way…Arthur… My foster brother … Why…?" Sir Kay quivered, at a loss for words.

"…Ha-ha. It's been ages, Sis… I wanted to see you."

"Aaah…but…but…" Sir Kay turned pale, sinking to her knees when he flashed her a smile.

It was obvious that the others had met him before. Despair was creeping on their faces.

"Why?! Why are *you* here…?!" Luna shouted, trying to conceal her surprise and failing. "You're supposed to be in the innermost part of Tir na Nog in the legendary island of Avalon—in a state of perpetual sleep to heal from the wound dealt to you by Sir Mordred… I thought that was why we're having the King Arthur Succession Battle to choose your heir…!"

The entire premise of the game had been overturned.

"So why?! If you can come back to this world, what's the point?!"

"Ha-ha. This is the Grand Guignol, generated by the head of the Fomorians—evil gods as told in Ireland's *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and passed down in Britain… This is the doing of Lord Balor."

"Did you just say Balor…?!"

Lately, it seemed she heard that name everywhere. Luna turned to Sir Galahad. The knight didn't lower her guard, readying herself as she nodded at Luna.

"Ha-ha. Sir Galahad will give you the details later…," Arthur said. "In fact, I bet she knows more than I do."

"…"

"I'll just clear up one thing. I'm going to lead these apparitions on fake Avalon Island and tear through the world. That's right. I'm going to cause the Wild Hunt."

"…?!"

"Right now, this island is the only place where there is a boundary between the real world and the illusory world. In other words…the Curtain of Consciousness has only started to collapse here. That's why so many apparitions have been cropping up on this side. If I was the one to start the Wild Hunt across the world's skies, what do you think would happen? What would humans think when they witnessed invincible apparitions?"

"…Well…they would *reconsider their prior beliefs*," Luna said. "People think that ghosts aren't real and that they can't exist… The Curtain of Consciousness is made of common knowledge, the collective consciousness of humankind. If humanity starts believing ghosts exist, then the seemingly absurd would become real."

"That's right… The Curtain of Consciousness containing those ghosts is crumbling… In other words, the Catastrophe is here." King Arthur admitted his terrible goal.

"B-but if you do that…!" Luna howled. "We would regress back to the age of myths! Gods and fiends would overrun the place like they owned everything. The world would go into chaos. Humans would be oppressed by these beings…and you're fine with that?!"

"What are you so angry about? We'll return the world to the state that it was meant to be in…where gods, fiends, apparitions, and humans exist… That's all."

Luna shivered. Something was wrong. There was something amiss about King Arthur. He was unmistakably the king in the flesh, but there was something off about the whole thing.

"Why…?" Luna questioned bravely, trying to contain her horror. "You used to wield your sword for the world and its people. You used to go on quests and fight your way through battlefields. I was sure you were a real hero… You're supposed to be a king among kings… How could you do anything that would lead to the end of the world…?!"

"Maybe I am. Maybe I'm not." King Arthur chuckled. "I'm Arthur. That's a fact. I'm Arthur in the flesh. Maybe…I'm just another version of myself."

"Another version…?"

"Uh-huh. The difference between a hero and a demon lord is whether you stand with humans or demons… Right?" King Arthur asked. Luna tilted her head. "In me, there exists no good or evil. I only became king—

champion for humankind—because Merlin and the Dame du Lac led me there… But what if that had never happened?"

That was right. Arthur's ways as king were not inherent to him but things learned. As proof, Arthur had dark tendencies—many of them, in fact. Over time, this common belief had transformed into the idea that King Arthur himself would lead the Wild Hunt, apparently.

"Don't you get it? I'm King Arthur, but my course of fate has been changed by a foul demon lord. As I am now, I'm the world's enemy—an existence that wants to destroy the planet using my natural-born powers as king…"

King Arthur laughed as if enjoying himself. Luna couldn't believe it.

"Don't you think this is the best kind of joke?" he asked. "I mean, the world is going to end at the hands of the man who cleared the way for humanity."

"You've got bad taste, Brit." Luna was starting to lose her cool, and she readied her sword—her Excalibur. "I'll give you something to laugh about—with my sword! And then we can have a happy ending and a good laugh!"

"*Siiigh…* This charade again?" He looked at her sword, disappointed. "You're all so proud of your brittle replicas… You only make fools of yourselves because you don't know the power of the true king's sword… Oh well…" King Arthur attempted to ready his own blade at his hip, but…

“My Kiiiiing! No need to show your own sword to these weaklings!” boomed a loud admonishment. The knight to King Arthur’s right had strained his voice.

Large, stern, rowdy. Two sizes larger than King Arthur in height and shoulder width.

“Stay back, my King. Allow us to take care of these tough guys,” said the young knight on King Arthur’s left.

Sharp eyes peeked out from his long, tousled golden-brown hair. His body was impossibly ripped and flexible, radiating something untamed that made him seem like a predator. He looked straight from a brutish group, but he bowed once to King Arthur and stepped forward to protect him.

Recognizing them, Sir Kay opened her eyes wide. “No way…! King Pellinore and Sir Balin…?!”

“…Who?”

“Two cornerstones of the original Round Table. King Pellinore—father of Sir Lamorak and leading knight of the original Round Table…and Balin le Savage—first wielder of the sword of the most virtuous knight.”

“Are they strong?” Luna asked.

“…Like demons,” Sir Kay responded. “They held down the Round Table in a time of upheaval, when wars in Britain were at their worst… They might be stronger than the three mightiest knights of the later Round Table in times of peace… Sir Lancelot, Sir Lamorak, and Sir Tristan.”

“…What?!” Luna flinched once, facing formidable opponents who she could not hold a candle to. “Hmph!” she said. “It doesn’t matter who appears at this point! If we don’t defeat them, the world will end!” She engaged her core, readying herself, and fixed her eyes on the three knights. “Sir Kay! Nayuki! Sir Galahad! Let’s do this! After me—”

Luna vaulted off the ground and started running in order to charge them right when…she realized something. At some point, a blade had closed in on her own neck.

Time seemed to slow for her. When she looked to the side…she saw that Sir Balin had managed to close the distance between them, coming at Luna’s neck like a flash of lightning.

He—he’s fast

…Too fast! I don’t have time to react! Luna’s thoughts seemed to freeze in place. This was all so abrupt.

“Hraaaaaaaaah!”

SRKK! An explosion of sparks. A grating noise.

Sir Galahad had barely had time to step in between them, and he sent Sir Balin’s sword back.

In that moment, the shock wave blasted a half-demolished building into pieces…

“Hmm? So there’s a knight, sword dulled by peace, who can take my lightning-fast blade?”

Sir Balin was unperturbed, however. Despite looking and acting like a berserker, he was calm to an extreme. He distanced himself from Sir Galahad…or rather, made them believe he was retreating. Sir Balin pounced on Sir Galahad with his two swords like a flash of light. Sir Galahad twirled her sword and spear to block him.

“And you’re a dual wielder like me…huh.”

“Luna! Run!” Sir Galahad urged.

“Aaaaah!” Luna swung up her Excalibur, sprinting at King Arthur at full speed.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! I’m not gonna let you pass!” King Pellinore —a muscular knight with a large physique like a boulder—stood in Luna’s way. “Take my swoooord—!”

King Pellinore swung down. For some reason, he aimed for the ground.

“…Huh?”

Luna and King Pellinore. There was a distance of over ten yards between them.

King Pellinore’s behavior seemed to disregard any normal sword-fighting techniques. Luna knit her eyebrows together, sprinting.

“Diiiiie!”

BWF! The earth split as his sword sank into the ground. *VWOOOOOM!* The island was rocked again like a super-quake of the highest magnitude. The surface split, overturning. Columns of dirt rose high into the sky.

Along with the rubble she had been caught up in, Luna was thrust upward. “Gah?!”

She almost lost consciousness from the sensation of zero gravity and the impact.

“There’s more where that came from!”

Eyes still on Luna, who was suspended midair, King Pellinore grabbed a fallen electrical pole in one hand. His hand was like a rock and dug right into it… He held up that ten-yard-long pole as though it were the stick of a willow tree.

“Dieeee!” He attempted to hit her with that thing while she was airborne.

There was something wrong with his head. Who would even imagine fighting like this? Sir Balin’s speed might have been off the charts, but King Pellinore’s physical strength was even more absurd. Luna could do nothing, groaning, trying to take on the approaching electrical pole…

“Not happening! Lahat Chereb?!” Flames engulfed Luna as if to protect her, racing up the pole like a snake and burning it to a crisp.

“What the—?!”

“Hrah!” Nayuki’s frost blasted King Pellinore and instantly made him ice.

King Pellinore had been enclosed in the block, but…

“Ha-ha-ha! Ridiculous! You think that’s enough to stop me?!” King Pellinore flexed once, and the ice exploded like fragile glass. “You two! You

have some fun tricks up your sleeve, but they're not doing anything, you know!"

"We know!"

"We're just slowing you down!"

"What did you say?!" King Pellinore turned around. "Whaaaaat?!"

Leaping from her position high up, Luna landed on Nayuki's block of ice, flying over King Pellinore's head—and touched down on the ground. She brandished her Excalibur and ran straight at King Arthur.

When they saw Luna pressing in…

"*Awooooo…!*" howled the Questing Beast from where it was waiting beside King Arthur.

"…Tsk," Sir Balin said, meeting swords with Sir Galahad.

"What?! No! Biggest mistake I've ever made!" King Pellinore didn't seem to care about the others.

The two knights and the beast started to move closer to protect King Arthur…

"Oh, it's fine. As you were." King Arthur put up a hand to make them stand down.

Using her chance, Luna leaped at King Arthur, landing within sword-fighting distance.

"Hiiiii-yaaaaaah!" Luna put her entire soul and body into delivering her blows.

King Arthur remained calm and collected…

"Fine. I'll show you." He readied his sword. "This is…the difference between you and me as kings."

Luna and King Arthur swung their swords at nearly the same time, passing by each other, locking together fiercely.

Metal shrieked against metal. A flash of white sparks exploded.

"…"

"…"

And then there was silence.

Luna and King Arthur stood with their backs to each other, having swung through their weapons. Everyone held their breaths.

Fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh… Something cut through the air, coming down over their heads.

KSHNK! It stabbed into the ground, twanging a slight distance from Luna and King Arthur. The blade of a sword.

"N-no way…! That's…?!" Felicia gasped, all too familiar with it.

"That…couldn't be…"

"B-but…?!"

Sir Kay and Nayuki turned pale, instantly understanding its implications.

"…?!" Luna couldn't hide her fear this time. She was sweating as she stared at her own Excalibur, hand shaking.

The blade was gone—severed. Luna's Excalibur had been broken in two.

Luna couldn’t tear her eyes away from the broken end. It just seemed so cruel.

“What did you expect? Did you forget the inscription of my sword?” King Arthur asked without even turning back to her.

In his hand…he held Excalibur. “It’s the Slashing Sword… Your replica could never win against the real thing.”

Luna looked down, remaining silent. King Arthur quietly sheathed his sword, ignoring her.

“I usually have my sword in my immortal sheath, but…my older sister—Morgan—stole it and threw it away…” King Arthur signaled to King Pellinore and Sir Balin with his hand. “Don’t you get it? This is what makes me a king. And I’m the true one. A king stands alone at the highest summit of everything that exists… You little knaves might try, but you could never get to my level.”

He turned around, passing by Luna’s side as she stood still. He started to leave.

“I’ll say I applaud your heroism. On my name, I overlook your crime of turning a sword on the king.”

The beast waiting beside him seemed to slowly melt away into nothingness… King Pellinore and Sir Balin also stopped fighting and followed King Arthur.

“This habit of yours… Are you sure about this, my King? Shouldn’t we deal with them here?” Sir Balin seemed to disapprove.

“It’s fine. Just leave it. We’ve already settled things. I’ve shown my dominance to those girls.” King Arthur smiled. “Even though we’re generations apart, those are my dear descendants. I don’t want to rough them up.”

“Understood.” Sir Balin stepped back.

Then, King Arthur left… Just like that. No one could say anything to him.

“Stop right there.”

Except one of them… Luna.

“I see… So maybe we’re aspiring for something out of our reach… So maybe it was disrespectful to even try… But…!” Luna glared at his back. “But I don’t see you as a king!”

“…But I already showed you. Your opinion of me is irrelevant.” King Arthur stopped, whirling around, and looked at Luna. “Your sword is broken. That should tell you all there is to know.”

“Hmph! So what?!”

“!” King Arthur’s eyes widened slightly.

“Forefather! I refuse to acknowledge someone like you! For I seek to rule in my own way! For I want to be myself! I swear I’ll beat you! You’re not fit to be king as you are now!”

“You cretin. You dare mock my master?” Sir Balin seemed to radiate murder, icy cold like a blizzard. His hand reached for the hilt of his sword.

“It’s fine; I don’t mind.” King Arthur held him back, stopping him from blowing his fuse. “I’ve already decided to pardon her. With my dignity as king on the line, I cannot kill her here.”

King Arthur turned to face Luna directly. “…You. What’s your name?”

“Luna… Luna Artur.”

“Artur…? Oh, you’re part of Borre’s line… I thought they were impossibly frail—the weakest ones of all…” King Arthur turned his back to her. “Luna Artur. I’ll announce this here. When the clock strikes midnight, I’ll lead the Wild Hunt and tear through the sky.”

“?!”

“I’ve already stated my reasons for it. As the current version of myself, I’m a king of ruin, destined to bring the downfall of humanity. I wish for it from my very heart. I’ll trigger the Catastrophe through the Wild Hunt and reign over the world as its demon lord… That’s why I exist. And that’s how I’ll rule.”

“But that would…!”

“If you wish to defy my ways and go about your own…you must defeat me.”

King Arthur pointed—toward the magnificent form of Dark Castle Camelot.

“I’ll be waiting there. The place where everything started…and where I’ll wait for you.”

With the knights and the monsters in tow, King Arthur then retreated.

“…”

Left behind, Luna stared at her own broken sword for a while.

Eventually, she looked up straight at the castle, eyes blazing.

“…Rintarou,” she muttered.

It was carried off by the wind that seemed to hint at twilight.

CHAPTER 2

The Truth

“Aaaaaah! But, Nayukiiii! I’m so happy you’re back!”

They were at the base—in the lounge of Logres Manor.

“I hate myself…! I can’t believe I lost my memories of you!” Felicia hugged Nayuki, bawling her eyes out.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha. Don’t be so hard on yourself… I stopped being a human and became something outside the biological kingdom… I had no place in anyone’s memories…”

“But I can’t forgive myself! *Sniffle!* I’m so relieved you’ve come back safe and sound!”

“Indeed. Without you…” Sir Gawain patted Felicia’s back as she blubbered.

“I’m so happy… Welcome home, Nayuki…” Emma gently wiped away happy tears over Nayuki’s return. “Um, Luna? Did master…Rintarou…do that for you to escape from that being called Balor…?”

Emma’s smile clouded over.

But Luna didn’t seem like she was in low spirits. “It’ll be fine! He’ll be back before we know it! Plus, Emma, do you really think your crush is so weak that he’d just kick the bucket?!”

“Cr—?! Crush…?! Wait, what?!” Emma turned red, overreacting. “Y-you’re right… My master *is* strong. I’d never imagine him dying because of something like that!”

“That’s right. That’s what you should think. We can’t be worrying about Rintarou when we have things to do—things that we *have* to do!” Luna nodded, looking around.

In the lounge were all the remaining contestants of the King Arthur Succession Battle… Sir Kay, Nayuki, Sir Galahad, Felicia, Sir Gawain, Emma, Reika Tsukuyomi (aka Sir Mordred), Sir Dinadan, Nanami Kuonji, Sir Percival, Misha, Sir Palamedes.

“…”

The air was heavy. Their expressions were dark. Sighs escaped them. Words stuck in their throats. To put it plainly, they were hopeless. There was no way around it. Anyone would be in the same position if they came across such evil.

“Anyway.” Luna ignored them. “Now that we’ve gotten a chance to breathe, give me the lowdown about Balor and King Arthur—about whatever’s going on behind the scenes with the King Arthur Succession Battle…”

Luna glanced at Sir Galahad and Nayuki before turning back to Felicia again. “Before that, Felicia, what happened on this island? Why has Avalonia become such a mess?”

“Let me explain… Well, I guess we don’t have a clue what’s happening, either…” Felicia shook her head. She was choosing her words carefully. “While you went on your search for the Holy Grail, we embarked on our treasure hunts for the Holy Sword, the Holy Spear, and the Holy Stone in the netherworld. That went well. We got our hands on them. It was so easy that it was a little anticlimactic…”

“Huh? What? Was it really that easy? That’s not fair.” Luna recalled her own experiences, looking unhappy.

“Well… I don’t think it was just easy. It seemed they wanted us to take the treasures and bring them back to the real world. A trap,” Sir Palamedes said.

“How so?” Luna asked.

Felicia continued. “We were ecstatic about bringing the great treasures back. Suddenly, dark spirits started to rise from the prizes…and terrifying things began to descend on us.”

“Oh, right. King Pellinore came from the Holy Sword, Sir Balin from the Holy Spear, and that beast came from the Holy Stone…which gave rise to the Questing Beast,” Sir Percival added.

“Yes, that’s right,” Felicia said. “It’s like the spell that allows Kings to summon Jacks, using Round Fragments. When the three monsters appeared, the entire island had turned into a netherworld. The Curtain of Consciousness was already punctured from that dark witch. Apparitions started to invade from the illusory world through the holes.”

“…The Curtain of Consciousness is damaged, huh…?” Luna remembered the handiwork of the witch in black from when they had dealt with Emma.

“At the same time…,” Felicia added. “Dark Castle Camelot manifested in Area One, and King Arthur appeared before us. I can still hardly believe it… Why did this happen…?” She breathed out a huge sigh and held her head.

“King Arthur is going to lead those apparitions, which are increasing by the minute, to cause the Wild Hunt… Hmm.” For a while, Luna looked like she was deep in thought. “All right! I don’t get it even in the slightest! Explain!” *Bwsh!* She pointed at Sir Galahad.

“Ah-ha-ha-ha… Fine. I’ll tell you what I was told by the Three Goddesses of Fate when I crossed worlds with the Holy Grail in the past… I’ll explain things chronologically. It might take a while. Don’t fall asleep on me.” Sir Galahad started to speak in front of everyone. “Let’s go back to the beginning of the world. It was back when gods were among humans. There were two divine families: the Dananns and the Fomorians.”

“Oh, you’re talking about the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*.”

“That’s right. The Dananns believed the gods existed for humans, because people created god, and thus people should rule the world. They guided humans and served as their protectors. The Fomorians believed the

gods existed to rule the world, since they were stronger than humanity. They disdained people and dominated them. Their ideologies were never going to align."

"…Which means they had to have a war, right?"

"Right. During the Second Battle of Mag Tuired, Lugh—god of light—from the Dananns defeated Balor—the Evil Eye—from the Fomorians, securing their victory. The Dananns chased many of the Fomorians into the illusory world, Tir na Nog. That's just straight from the *Lebor Gabála Érenn…* But well, that was the start of it all."

"Seems the story is already something that's out of our hands…" Luna looked sleepy.

Sir Galahad smiled wanly. "After the Fomorians were chased into Tir na Nog, the Three Goddesses of Fate—Morrigan, Badb, and Macha—hatched a plan to make this the real human world, even though it still contained both real and illusory existences. They wanted to create the Curtain of Consciousness, so humanity could live without depending on gods. They strengthened people and created a clear divide between where the gods and humans resided. Even though the gods guided them, humans feared apparitions, which slowed progress…"

"…So even the gods had their hardships."

"The Three Goddesses of Fate formed an organization called the Dame du Lac to carry out their plan. They bestowed power to the first Dame du Lac, Vivian, and indirectly intervened with the human world. They forced progress onto humans and solidified the Curtain of Consciousness. Tying this plan together was King Arthur. They tried to get the 'perfect human king' to bring public order to a world running rampant with apparitions and wrecked from wars. He was to prove that humans were strong, thus completing the Curtain of Consciousness."

Sir Galahad continued. "But this rubbed some people the wrong way. Like Balor, the Evil Eye, leader of the Fomorians who once ruled the world. He wanted to regain control, stripped from him by the Dananns, and rule again. The Curtain of Consciousness is like a net. Someone strong like Balor couldn't come back to the real world, and he was desperate to stop the solidification of the barrier. King Arthur was in his way. So Balor came up with a plan. He pushed himself into an erotic dream and forced a human to birth Merlin—half human, half Balor. On his son, he placed a curse *to select King Arthur and kill King Arthur* before sending him to the human world."

"He would select King Arthur and kill him…?" Luna parroted quietly.

Sir Galahad nodded. "This curse was so wicked, it wouldn't stop at obliterating King Arthur's body. It would eat his soul. Killed by Merlin, King Arthur would be erased from existence. But Merlin had no idea. He was guided by fate to come upon the king and serve him. He became a close friend—all without knowing that he would someday kill him. But…"

Nayuki boldly cut in. “Lady Vivian, the head of the Dame du Lac, realized Balor’s intentions. Before Merlin could kill Arthur, Lady Vivian gave me—Nimue—an order… I sealed Merlin away and killed him.”

Nayuki faced her truth, unemotional, but a suffocating silence followed her confession.

“…To continue.” Sir Galahad tried to stave off that mood. “With Merlin, fated killer of King Arthur, out of the picture, King Arthur unified Britain, as the Dame du Lac anticipated. The Curtain of Consciousness was complete. As civilization developed, it became stronger. Gods and apparitions became distant. They should have disappeared completely. Balor’s plan should have gone nowhere. But…”

“…Balor came up with another plan… Right?” Felicia asked.

Sir Galahad nodded. “That’s it. Balor had a secondary objective. He knew his plan to murder King Arthur would fail…since the three goddesses and the Dame du Lac were keeping him under a strict watch. That was why Balor had secretly contacted Morrigan—youngest sister of the Three Goddesses of Fate—and joined forces with her.”

“…Hmm? *Morrigan?*” That sounded familiar. Like in the legends of King Arthur…

Sir Galahad replied to Luna. “Morrigan and Balor joined forces and made their move…to destroy the Curtain of Consciousness… In other words, they headed toward the Catastrophe. Badb and Macha, the remaining two of the Three Goddesses of Fate, prophetically warned the Dame du Lac about Morrigan and Balor. To prevent the end of the world, the Dame du Lac held the King Arthur Succession Battle, but that itself had been Balor and Morrigan’s trap.”

“…Wha—?!”

“Did you know the Holy Sword, the Holy Spear, the Holy Stone, and the Holy Grail—key to this battle—were originally the four treasures of the Érenn from the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*?”

“…The Holy Sword was Nuada’s, the Holy Spear was Lugh’s, the Holy Stone was Lia Fáil’s, and the Holy Grail was Dagda’s… I think?”

“That’s right. The Dananns granted them to humans when they returned to Tir na Nog, but…Balor had a part of his spirit enshrined in the Holy Grail.”

Luna realized she was holding her breath. That was fresh in her memory.

During her quest, Luna had encountered that evil that dwelled in the Holy Grail…

“The four treasures are spiritually connected. So the corruption in the Holy Grail transmitted itself to the other treasures over time. There was a curse on them that they would summon monsters connected to them, if they were brought back to the real world. It’s kind of like when you summon Jacks with Round Fragments. King Pellinore is connected to the Holy Sword, as the one who broke Excalibur. Sir Balin brought ruin to a kingdom

through the Dolorous Stroke, connecting him to the Holy Spear. The Questing Beast swallowed the Round Table, establishing a link to the Holy Stone. There's a knight with a connection to those three artifacts, deeper than anyone. Right? That's…"

"… King Arthur…!" Luna gritted her teeth.

"Yes, but don't get the wrong idea. King Pellinore, Sir Balin, and King Arthur are heroes in their natural state. But their personalities can be heavily influenced by their summoner. Their current versions have been contaminated by Balor, dominated by the dark side of heroism… Reverse Jacks, so to speak. King Pellinore let a maiden be killed, crazed by battle; Sir Balin ruined a kingdom; King Arthur murdered children. Heroes with guilty consciences, all of them. They make perfect Reverse Jacks. Maybe they would have been this way even without prompting."

"It's possible… My father…," Sir Mordred muttered as if coming to terms with something.

"Do you get it now?" Sir Galahad asked. "This was all a trap to have Dark King Arthur start the Wild Hunt, demolish the Curtain of Consciousness, and allow Balor to advance into this world. King Arthur is like one of Balor's own… He's the enemy of the world, plain and simple."

"What…?" Luna groaned, slumping. "So the King Arthur Succession Battle to avoid world annihilation is a one-way ticket to world annihilation?! This isn't funny! Couldn't those goddesses prophesize something useful for once?!"

"They can only see the rough course of fate and the results of things. They apparently can't see the details. Humans have infinite possibilities and divergences…or so the goddesses said."

"Ugh, useless!" Luna said.

Sir Galahad smiled wanly and started the main part of the story. "But there's a pitfall to Balor's trap."

"What pitfall?" Luna scowled.

"You don't know? Though Balor set up the King Arthur Succession Battle to bring about the advent of Dark Arthur…someone might be born to oppose Dark Arthur and Balor."

"You don't possibly mean…?"

"That's right. The true King Arthur. The one to excel in the original King Arthur Succession Battle and ascend the throne. The existence of this individual would get in the way of Balor's plan… He'd need to make this person disappear. Isn't that right?"

Nayuki interrupted again. "Balor used Merlin, reborn in this era… He used Rintarou, Luna, to deal with you."

""""Huh?!""""" Everyone stared at Luna.

"W-w-wait?! What's going on?! I-it's not like I've been selected as the true King Arthur yet… Well, I *have* been bragging about being the best fit, but…?!"

“Didn’t I tell you? Merlin will ‘*select King Arthur and kill King Arthur*.’ It’s a curse, but it means he can detect the true king.” Sir Galahad looked straight at Luna. “It’s not enough to Balor to just kill you. Even if he did, you’d inevitably be born again in this world and become king. It’ll just delay the problem for a god with all the time in the world. Plus, it would spell more trouble if he lost sight of your whereabouts. If he’s going to kill you, he’ll need to do it while he knows where you are. Which is why Merlin needs to kill you, tied to the curse of destroying you. It gives birth to a certain paradox. Luna… You’re meant to succeed King Arthur. It became your destiny as soon as Rintarou Magami selected you. No one else can become King Arthur now.”

“—?!” Luna took it in with mute amazement.

“The specter of Morrigan was always with Rintarou. For him to kill you, Morrigan needed Merlin’s power to awaken. She must have carried out plans to do that…but Rintarou *didn’t* kill you, Luna, even after his true powers as Merlin were realized,” Nayuki said.

“It seems your bond with Rintarou…conquered fate,” Sir Galahad added.

“Lady Badb and Lady Macha of the Three Goddesses of Fate informed me that this might be possible if your bond deepened…but I hadn’t been able to speak about it until now because of a vow—a *geas*—with Lady Vivian…”

“That’s enough,” Luna said firmly. “That’s enough.”

“… Luna…”

“I’m sorry, Luna… I understand why you might be angry…”

Nayuki and Sir Galahad lowered their eyes, looking apologetic.

“I imagine you trained to become King Arthur as if your life depended on it…but now you know you’re just a pawn of some game controlled by the gods… I see why you’re angry. I’m sorry…,” Sir Galahad repeated. The room was silent now.

Tmp, tmp. Luna came around to Sir Galahad from behind. “You know, you’re…”

“Hmm?”

Luna wrapped her arms around Sir Galahad’s neck… “You were planning on leaving this world with such vital information?! Are you stupid?! Before you apologize about some random nonsense, why don’t you start by apologizing for that instead?!”

“Gah?! Yow! Ow-ow-ow! I-I’m sorry!”

She was wringing Sir Galahad’s neck, bringing the knight down. Everyone blinked in shock.

“Gah?! Ack! Uh, um… Aren’t you mad, Luna?!”

“Obviously! I’m seething, dummy! Communication is key!”

“Not about that! I’m talking about how the gods were toying with you!”

“Huh?” Luna looked at her like she was a strange animal. “Sir Galahad… You might be the immaculate paladin or the holiest saint or whatever, but it seems you’re missing a brain with that package.”

“Y-you’re so mean!”

“Why would I be angry? I don’t give a crap about the gods a world over.” Luna released Sir Galahad and pointed at her. “I’m going to become the king—a king who he can be proud of! That’s what I want, and that’s why I’ve fought until now! I don’t care about whatever is going on backstage! Those self-proclaimed directors should keep their opinions to themselves and watch until the finale! Isn’t that right?!”

“—?!” Even Sir Galahad was at a loss for words.

“Now we know exactly what we need to do! We’ve gotta beat the pulp out of Dark King Arthur! Stop the Wild Hunt and save the world! And that’s that!”

“…”

“I like this world! I love the human world where actions today mean consequences tomorrow! We won’t be ruled by some gods, so I don’t care what they think or want! I’m fighting for the sake of our future!”

…Light started to return to the eyes of the dejected group, like smoldered embers blazing again.

“That’s right… You’ve always been this way, Luna…” Felicia stood up. “I was daunted by gods and King Arthur and other almighty beings… But that’s not why I wanted to become king… You think the gods decided this? You think it was fate? Simply not true! I live! I exist! I live this way because I want to!”

“…Yeah. I was about to make another mistake…” Sir Mordred got to her feet. “I vowed to atone for my past sins and become a king who would save the people this time… This is the time for me to show my resolve…! Why would I be afraid, just because we’re going up against someone too powerful to fight against…? Why should I fear King Arthur…?!”

“I’ve also made my decision.” Sir Gawain stood next to Felicia. “Sorry Felicia… I had my doubts. I swore fealty to King Arthur in the past and wondered if I should have gone back to serving him as a knight again… King Arthur was so great that he made me question myself…”

“Sir Gawain…?”

“But he’s both King Arthur and he isn’t. I can’t ignore that. I need to right my wrongs. And I’m convinced…you’re the one I should serve. I offer my sword and soul to the noble king who stands back up, even when she’s knocked down.”

“Ha-ha-ha… Do what you want, Mor.” Sir Dinadan gently gave Sir Mordred a pat on the shoulder. “You’re going to be turning your sword on King Arthur in this life, too…but it takes on new meaning. Do what your heart tells you. I couldn’t do it in your last life, but this time, I’ll watch where you head until the very end.”

Sir Mordred’s face turned red as she looked away. “Hm-hmph! You better help in the battle, if you’re going to talk big! I think you’re forgetting you’re weak!”

“I’ll fight, Luna.” Even Emma—sans Excalibur and Jack—stood up, though she’d lost her tools to be king. “I was forced into this. I didn’t want to become a king. I don’t think my heart has completely healed… To be honest, saving the world and its humans isn’t an idea that comes naturally to me. But the time I spent with you, Master, Nayuki, Sir Kay, Felicia, Sir Gawain… That’s time I can’t ever re-create.”

Emma stared straight at Luna as if challenging her. “I’m the weakest link, and I don’t have the honorable motivations like all of you or the makings of a king… But if we can bring back those good times…I’ll fight! Please let me join you!”

“Me too, Luna!” Sir Kay declared, as if it was a given. “I can’t stand to see Arthur like that! As the king, he was too kind, which was why he wasn’t fit to rule…but he wasn’t the type to destroy the world, even if he did make mistakes… As his older sister, I’ve got to drill that into him. He’s been tempted by evil and led down the wrong path!”

Next was Nayuki. “This all stemmed from the hubris and deceit of the Dame du Lac… As the last remaining member, I have the duty to fight… Well, duty has nothing to do with this. I feel the same way as everyone else. I love this world and our time together…so I’ll stay by you until the end, Luna.”

“I’ve been listening to you for too long…Luna Artur…!” Misha joined in, even though she had the hardest time buying it. “Don’t you understand you’re up against *the* King Arthur…? I mean, he showed you just how much stronger he is…and broke your Excalibur, and you’re still wanting to fight?! I won’t accept you… You make it seem like I’m the inferior one!”

“Not ‘*seem*,’ Misha. You *are* inferior. Got it?”

“W-watch it! Fine! I’ll be the one to beat *you*! I just need to put this situation to rest first!”

Even timid Nanami spoke up… “I-I’ve been running away my whole life… But I want to help you with my Excalibur…even if I can’t fight…”

They were roused to action for their own reasons, but all the Kings had one objective.

“Ha-ha-ha. Look at us! My army is awesome. We’re going to win, huh.” Luna thrust her chest out, planting her hand on her hip as she smiled in satisfaction.

“…You’re amazing, Luna.” Sir Galahad looked at her, deep in thought. “Even though your principles and convictions don’t match, even though they were drowning in despair,” she whispered in admiration, “you rallied them up. You might just have the making of a true king.”

“Why are you stating the obvious?” Luna shrugged.

Sir Galahad smiled. “Ah-ha… May I ask you something, Luna?”

“What?”

Sir Galahad lowered her voice so others couldn’t hear, which made Luna frown. “You’ve been defeated once by King Arthur. Your Excalibur is broken… Do you really feel like you’ve got a chance?”

“Who knows. I don’t know; that’s for sure.”

“But you’re still facing him?”

“Why shouldn’t I? It’s not about winning or losing. I’m fighting because I have to fight, and I’m winning because I have to win.”

Sir Galahad seemed surprised, somewhat. “How are you…so strong?”

“Hmm?”

“All of us think going up against King Arthur is an impossible task… It’s not even about his physical strength. We’re intimidated by the authority of this great king. Why aren’t you?”

“Heh-heh! Do you think the world’s best boy—who I want to make my vassal more than anyone—would serve a person who was intimidated by someone like King Arthur?”

“!”

“I mean, he promised he would serve the world’s best king. So I need to be the best. There’s no other reason.”

“I see… So it’s Merlin…Rintarou Magami…” Sir Galahad smiled mischievously. “Even a great king thinks highly of Rintarou Magami, huh. I guess he possesses an honest heart that thinks of Nayuki. An iron will to hesitatingly take on the rear guard to protect you from evil after the Holy Grail quest… Ha-ha… You’ve piqued my interest in him.”

“Hmm? Did you say something?”

“Nothing. Okay, Luna, let’s prepare to fight,” Sir Galahad urged.

“Heh-heh-heh. Sure is nice being young… Yeah, I think that would be for the best. Time for a strategy meeting.” Sir Dinadan grinned. “We had three setbacks in our earlier battle: the enemy’s unexpected arrival, our inability to work as allies, and our lack of force… Now we have Luna as a leader, Sir Kay’s sword, Nayuki’s access to the Holy Grail’s power, and the ace up our sleeve—Sir Galahad. It’s looking more promising than before.”

“Hmm? Finally showing your resourceful side, Sir Dinadan.” Sir Mordred snorted, watching him. “That’s the only thing you can do. Rack those brains of yours for knowledge.”

“Ha-ha-ha. Harsh… Well, I do need to make myself useful.”

“So that’s that!” *Bwoosh!* Luna swung open her arms. “We’re gonna start a Round Table discussion to beat the living crap out of our silly ancestor—starting…now!”

The hour of the final fight was drawing nearer.

—

It was a day in the distant past.

“Ugh! What do you think, Accolon?! Isn’t that letch the worst?!”

“Ha-ha-ha. Sir Gertrude’s lustful attitude is certainly a problem…”

“All he sees are my face and my body! He won’t see me for who I am! Who the hell would get in the sack with *him*?!”

In the garden at Castle Camelot, a man and a woman were seated at the table, sipping from teacups. Morgan and Sir Accolon.

“Ugh… They all either fear me for being a witch or use the worst pickup lines because they’re after my body! Not a single good man is on this side of the world!”

“On this side of the world? Sometimes, you say the strangest things, I swear. Anyway, you’re beautiful when you’ve got your mouth shut… You’re to blame for the former issue, you know.”

“W-w-watch it! Accolon, you don’t have enough going for you to be so rude! Do you think you’re worthy of expressing your opinion to me?!”

“Oh, so now I can’t even state my mind? I apologize, Princess.” Sir Accolon smiled—he didn’t even look like she hurt his feelings—and took another sip of his tea.

“Well… I guess you’re a weird man yourself, Accolon,” Morgan said curiously.

“What about me is weird?”

“Well… Didn’t I make a rather aggressive advance on you when we first met?”

“Oh…that.”

“Any man would follow me right to the bedroom if I tried. But you weren’t swayed at all. You didn’t respond or deny me. You evaded me… You’re so dry for your age.”

“…Let me be.”

“But it’s not like you’re scared of me like the other cowards. I mean, you’re talking with me now…and you don’t seem to have any ulterior motives. You’re so strange.”

“Average. Boring. A wallflower… I’ve been called many things, but no one has called me strange. I thought my main trait was that I was ordinary.”

“Shut up. That’s not a trait. There’s nothing redeeming about you. You have no gifts. Your first mistake was trying to find a way to stand out at the Round Table, when you’re so average. Know your own place.” Morgan drained her tea.

“Ouch… Maybe I’ll stop coming by to see you…”

“What?! Uh! I, well, um! Th-that was a joke! It was just a joke!”

“Which part?”

“Uh, the part where I said……?”

“Please tell me it’s when you said I was ordinary! I don’t care if you have to lie! You’re going to make me cry!”

They continued their banter as if they were old friends. Time seemed to pass when they were gently quarrelling…

“…Hey, Accolon? Why do you spend time with me?” Morgan propped up her chin in her hand. Even though her mind was usually filled with wicked schemes, she seemed actually interested for once. “I hate saying this myself, but I imagine I’m an annoying one.”

“Annoying, you are. And egoistic, unpredictable, arrogant, jealous, short-tempered…”

“Urk! You’d be a dead man if you said that any other time…but I need you to answer. Why have you involved yourself with me?”

“…” Sir Accolon looked away, silent for a while… “…I guess because you looked lonely.”

“Huh?”

“You do whatever you want—seducing any man and confounding those around you with your plots…but you seemed terribly lonely, like a kitten abandoned by the roadside… I just couldn’t leave you be.”

“—?!” Morgan was too stunned for words, as if she’d been struck by lightning.

“This conversation is over.” Sir Accolon shook his head, embarrassed. “Anyway, I’ll give you attention when you need it… So can you stop causing so much trouble for everyone else…?”

Morgan shouted like a child having a temper tantrum. “Sh-shut up! Shut up! You’ve gone too far, Accolon!”

For some reason, her face had gone bright red. Morgan had fallen in love with the average knight Sir Accolon…

It didn’t take her long after to realize this was the first time she’d fallen in love.

Some might say they were made for each other. Or it was like water to a thirsty soul.

Morgan’s world changed now that she was in love with Sir Accolon.

Gone was the monotony. Everything was so vibrant. She’d come to find the boring world stunning and amazing. She was starting to think she’d done the right thing by becoming a human and giving up on being a god.

When would she see him next? Morgan waited for Sir Accolon like an impatient child. During her cherished times with him, she teased Sir Accolon, who acted like he was growing tired of her jokes.

I would have done anything for him… This was the first time in her life that a single human was so precious to her. I wouldn’t have minded offering my body, my mind, my soul, or my existence as a god to him…if that’s what he wanted…

But Sir Accolon didn’t want anything from Morgan. All he did was quietly stay beside her—the notorious witch, the target of derision or desire. Sir Accolon sought nothing from her.

As a witch, I could have given him riches, political influence, military honor, prestige…but he didn’t want anything from me…

Maybe it was because he was normal—surprisingly so. Maybe he just didn’t want any of those things. What made him an average knight was his loyalty to King Arthur. That’s it.

I wanted to express my love for him… I wanted to do something for him… I couldn’t stand other people calling the most wonderful man in the world average… I wanted to give him the highest honors and position, even if he didn’t want it… I mean, that’s the only way to express how I feel or repay him for saving me from loneliness…

That was why Morgan had come up with a plan—

—

"…This is unusual, Morgan."

Morgan whipped around when someone spoke to her from behind.

"Something on your mind? You look like a lovesick maiden, daydreaming about her love."

"…None of your business. Keep your nose out of this, Mr. Kujou."

Morgan turned around to find Mr. Kujou and Sir Lancelot. They were on the top floor of Dark Castle Camelot—in the throne room. Morgan had been staring into the twilight—burning bright red—from the window, mind weaving through her memories.

"…What's the status of the situation?" she asked.

"Ah yes, the Wild Hunt is progressing as planned. It will proceed when the clock strikes twelve, as the folklore has stated."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha… I see… So it will…" Morgan nodded, satisfied. "It's been so long… An eternity, almost… And in a little bit, I'll…" Her face softened when it was usually cold and inscrutable.

The doors to the throne room burst open. Making an appearance was…

"'Sup. I'm home, Morgan…" King Arthur wore a smile, placid but somehow ill-boding.

"…Hmph."

"Make waaaay! The king has retuuuuurned!"

On standby at his side were Sir Balin and King Pellinore.

"Arthur…!" Morgan glared at him.

"Oh, Sis… Seems someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed."

"Says you…"

"*…Sigh.* Do you really hate me? I mean, all the stuff with Sir Accolon was kind of your fault."

"…Grah… I know! But I still…!"

"We might have bad blood between us…but let it go for a moment. Aren't we working for the same goal?"

Morgan went silent.

"I'll destroy the Curtain of Consciousness with the Wild Hunt, bringing the Catastrophe. Then I'll eliminate the boundary between the real world and the illusory world to destroy the human sphere. As kin to Balor, I will rule over the world as the demon lord, and you'll…"

"…Shut up! I know! I'll fulfill my role! That's what I've been working toward and what was in the contract! I've torn the Curtain of Consciousness on this artificial island, meddled with the magical ceremony, and even performed the ritual to summon apparitions and Dark Castle Camelot! Except the new Arthur hasn't been killed by Merlin, due to some miscalculations…" Morgan looked away.

"Don't worry about it," Arthur said. "Sometimes, humans go past the expectations of god and fate. We'll work with what we have to carry out our duty…" King Arthur smiled contentedly. "Lord Souma Gloria…Kujou, was it?

Thank you for working with me. I'm looking forward to both of us fulfilling our desires."

"The pleasure is all mine… The once and future king… A true hero who has appropriately revived that title in this modern time." Mr. Kujou smiled derisively.

"And Sir Lancelot…I'm happy to see you again," King Arthur said to the knight next to Mr. Kujou.

"…I am as well, my King." It was the only time he spoke with emotion, expression stolid. "I'm afraid, my King, that my master in this life is Lord Kujou alone. I can't wait upon any other ruler. I hope you'll forgive me, if only for that."

"Don't mention it… It's enough that we get to fight on the same side again."

"Whaaaat?! My King! You can't possibly be planning to give the honor of participating in the Wild Hunt to these jesters!" King Pellinore objected.

"I mean… Sir Lancelot rebelled against you. Even if it was your idea, I can't accept him in your hunting party in good conscience," Sir Balin growled, staring down Sir Lancelot with a glint in his eyes like a wild beast.

"I may speak out of turn, but can they even stand alongside us?!" King Pellinore asked.

"The strongest in the Round Table?" Sir Balin scoffed. "Hmph… He was granted that title after the wars were long over. I don't find it merited in the least."

"…I welcome you to test me," Sir Lancelot murmured. That was the trigger.

Sir Balin disappeared—closing the distance between them to swipe at the knight.

Claaaaaaang! Metal shrieked against metal. His feet made a sonic boom that blew out the walls in all directions. *BWSH!* A sword twanged in the ceiling. Standing with their backs to each other were Sir Balin and Sir Lancelot, who had finished following through with his swing.

"…Hmm? Nice." Sir Balin wore a ferocious smile. "I never would have guessed you'd send one of my swords flying… Seems your title was no joke. Good technique. No one in our era had a sword like yours."

Sir Balin—knight of two swords—had lost his left blade to the ceiling.

"…I should be praising you. You live up to your fame, as one of the strongest of the early Round Table." Sir Lancelot sheathed his sword to indicate they were done. "You're faster than the rumors. If you didn't hold back, who knows what could have happened?"

"Quit it. I bet you haven't even shown a glimpse of your true power."

"…Maybe. I wonder if I could keep up with you, if that was all I had."

"A crafty man. I'd like to have a real fight to the death with you at some point."

The two knights praised each other…

“Hmmm? Tricks? Speed? You think you’re so sly! Raw power is the only thing that makes someone strong! You need to put on more muscle!” King Pellinore evaluated, unmoved by their exceptional session.

King Arthur grinned, watching their antics. “It seems we’ve reached a conclusion. I’m happy that I get to start the Wild Hunt with only the best of men.” He turned to them all. “We need to get on the move… Tonight, the world will end. I’ll bring an end to everything I created…”

It was all beginning to move. The countdown on destruction had begun.

All would happen when the clock struck midnight. And then everything would be over.

CHAPTER 3

Commence the Pivotal Battle

They left Logres Manor, advancing to the center of the artificial island where Dark Castle Camelot towered—to Area One of Avalonia.

Area One was the so-called center of the city, home to facilities that unified the city's justice department, governance, and public hospitals.

Unlike Area Two with its overcrowded skyscrapers, this district seemed futuristic with its fusion of western architecture and nature… There was the occasional skyscraper and condo, wide highways, and roadside trees and parks to complete its polished look.

At the moment, even the city was rife with apparitions, strutting about the streets as though they owned the place. Hell—a city of demons—with all sorts of monsters and ghouls.

Those too late in escaping were hiding in their homes, fearful of the procession of apparitions wandering through the town, accepting their nightmare of a situation.

"What a sorry state…"

In the outskirts of Area One was the Great Caerleon Bridge, the largest drawbridge on the island, crossing the artificial river that bordered Area Two.

There were two gothic towers—sixty yards tall—on the 245-yard bridge. Luna was looking at Area One from the upper level of the bridge, suspended between the two towers.

"Remember that game where there's a virus outbreak, and the town turns into a zombieville? That's what this reminds me of… Sans zombies."

"*Sigh…* Luna. I can't believe you're so laid-back in this situation…," Sir Kay said, exasperated.

Luna ignored her, looking farther into the distance. Sticking up like a sore thumb was Dark Castle Camelot, as if insisting it be seen.

After sending a Messenger Pixie to scope it out, they found the castle had appeared over city hall, which had been used as a base by the Dame du Lac, swallowing up the building. In addition to serving as a base, the city hall had hosted the mystical ceremony of the succession battle. Basically, the King Arthur Succession Battle had been meddled with by a third party from the very beginning, and it was now unrecognizable from its original intent. It had all been a grand charade.

At this point, it didn't really matter.

"I thought I was mentally prepared…but my head is starting to hurt…" Felicia sighed, standing next to Luna. "Even if we have a plan, it seems

irrational to think we can get through the apparitions infesting this place, break into that castle, and fight King Arthur…"

"You're right, my liege. If Rintarou were here…," Sir Gawain said.

"Um, Luna… Do you think Rintarou is okay?" Nayuki asked anxiously. "At the end of the quest, he stayed behind to let us escape, fighting against Balor…who is Merlin's birth parent. This Balor might only possess a portion of his real power, but he's still plenty strong…"

"…"

"Not that I don't believe in Rintarou…but he's fighting a suboptimal enemy in a suboptimal location… The enemy is formidable, and the location is deep in Balor's domain in the netherworld… I'm worried about it… What if Rintarou…?"

Luna flipped around to face Nayuki, beaming like the sun. "It'll be fine! Rintarou will be fine!" She grabbed the hawthorn Celtic cross hanging off her neck and showed it to them. "He'll eventually make his way back to me. I don't really know why…but I'm sure he will."

"!"

"But I don't know when he'll get back. It might be a month. It might be a year… It might be longer than that. But he'll eventually find his way to us. To welcome him home, there's something I need to do now—as a king!"

Nayuki blinked at Luna… "Hee-hee." She laughed—calmly and enviously. "I don't stand a chance against you, Luna…"

"Hmm? For what?" Luna seemed confused.

"Hee-hee. It's a secret." Nayuki smiled. "Luna… Will it be okay?" she asked nervously.

"Will *what* be okay?"

"Your Excalibur…of course." Emma looked at the sword hanging off Luna's hip. "…Didn't King Arthur break it?"

"Oh, this old thing?" Luna pulled her Excalibur from its sheath and displayed it.

It was broken in half, obviously.

"Hmm… I guess my range has been cut in half… I might be at a disadvantage for a close-range fight."

"That's not what I meant…," Emma said. "An Excalibur is, um…"

Luna immediately understood. An Excalibur reflected a King's psychological state and served as a mirror to their soul. If it was broken, that meant her heart had accepted defeat. In other words, she had lost her qualification to be a King. The same thing had happened to Emma in the past.

"But it doesn't seem like you've been disqualified, Luna…"

"Huh. You're right. Sir Kay and Sir Galahad would have disappeared if I wasn't a King… I don't have a clue. Why hasn't anything happened?"

"Y-your guess is as good as mine…"

Sir Galahad seemed amused. "Ah-ha-ha. Luna, you're exactly like King Arthur."

“I am?”

“Yeah. King Arthur’s Excalibur—his first one, the blade that selected the king—was broken by King Pellinore, an enemy at the time. But that sword wasn’t important to the king, I think, because he’d won…by surviving for the next fight.”

“…”

“In the end, King Arthur got the strongest sword… His second one: the Slashing Sword.”

“Hmm? Well, whatever.” Luna looked at her halved sword. “I guess I’m shocked. We’ve fought together for all this time… And I don’t think I’ll be able to use my Royal Road anymore.”

That was the worst news of all.

Even though Luna’s sword had complex prerequisites, the Steel Sword of Camaraderie could deal the biggest blow of all the Kings’ swords. Broken in two, it lost that ability. She knew her enemies wouldn’t let her charge up her attack…but losing her best trick was a tough blow.

“Well, I’m sure things will work themselves out.” Optimistic that way, Luna put her sword away in its scabbard. “You should be worried about yourself, Emma. Are you sure you’ll be all right? Can you fight with that sword?” She turned back to the girl.

Emma held an Excalibur, an exact replica of King Arthur’s sword.

This was Nanami Kuonji’s Royal Road, the Steel Sword of Final Retaliation.

The sword embodied an episode where Arthur had entrusted his Excalibur to Sir Bedivere to sink into the lake, knowing he was nearing his end after suffering a fatal wound on Camlann Hill from Sir Mordred.

When this Royal Road was invoked, Nanami Kuonji would be sent to the shore of a lake in a netherworld and put to sleep. In exchange, she could entrust King Arthur’s Excalibur to someone other than herself.

Of course, there were disadvantages. The Slashing Sword would disappear after it was used three times, and Nanami Kuonji would resurface in the real world, exposing her defenseless to the enemy. This reflected the story of Sir Bedivere, reluctant to sink Excalibur into the lake. The knight had lied to King Arthur twice before returning the sword the third time.

Nanami Kuonji was a young, powerless girl who had unfortunately been forced into the King Arthur Succession Battle by fate. She didn’t even know anything about it before, and she’d been able to survive until now by taking refuge in the netherworld using her Royal Road. She would entrust the sword to her Jack, Sir Percival, and devote herself to escape.

“To put it bluntly, we’re shorthanded. I think it’s huge that Nanami entrusted you with the Slashing Sword so you can be back in action, Emma,” Luna said.

Just by possessing the Excalibur, Emma received a boost to her physical capabilities. For a girl with already good swordsmanship, this was more than enough to allow her to fight.

“But you can only use the Royal Road three times… Well, two times, since we don’t want to abandon Nanami on the battlefield. If we go over that…”

“It’s all right… Nanami is prepared,” assured her Jack, Sir Percival. “We can’t continue to run. She realized she needed to do something herself… when she saw you, Luna.”

“I’ll use my power to honor the small amount of courage that Nanami mustered for this critical battle. I’ll make sure to protect her,” Emma stated. There was nothing more to be said.

“…All right then. Lend me your strength, Emma and Nanami!” Luna smiled placidly, nodding.

“Ugh. What’s with you…? Why are you running the show, Luna Artur…?!” Misha seemed frustrated. “It’s like you’re the leader or something…!”

“Not ‘like.’ I *am* the leader.” Luna thrust a finger out at her, flashing a revoltingly smug smile. “Sooooorry, Misha. Seems I have a royal magnetism that can’t be suppressed. Sorry for stealing the show. I guess natural-born leaders are just propped up by those around them. It’s like I end up at the center of attention without trying. You’re unlucky that you were born in the same age as someone brimming with potential… Sucks to be you!”

“I-I’ll remember this…! When we’re done with this fight, I’ll make sure to give *you* a sound beating…! We’ll settle who’s on top—once and for all!”

“Fine by me. I’ll let you challenge the king.”

“I wish you’d drop your attitude!”

Misha's Jack—Sir Palamedes—seemed resigned, smiling dryly, as he watched them quarrel.

"Well, Luna, we don't have time. Let's get a move on," Sir Palamedes urged.

"Right." Luna nodded. "…Sir Galahad."

"Yeah, uh-huh." Sir Galahad leaped, jumping to stand on the top of one of the towers closer to Area One. Before her were the streets of Area One, where monsters and ghouls congregated.

What spread before her were the streets of the First Area, which were teeming with monsters and ghosts.

From the bridge, the main street led straight to Dark Castle Camelot.

As the crow flies, it wasn't far. But it would take forever if they needed to cut through apparitions.

"…" Sir Galahad quietly pulled out her spear.

The Lance of Longinus. Sir Galahad had acquired it on the journey of the quest for the Holy Grail during the legendary era. It was the spear that unleashed a Dolorous Stroke and helped Sir Balin drive a country to ruin. It was the spear that stabbed Jesus Christ in the ribs. It was the spear that originally belonged to the god of light, who had fought Balor. It was Lugh's spear, one of the four treasures of Érenn.

It was the Holy Spear.

After Sir Galahad died, the Holy Spear had been recovered by the Dame du Lac and become King Arthur's favorite spear, but Sir Galahad had been the one to master its power, according to lore. Even King Arthur had only been able to unleash a restricted version of its strength as the Spear Ron. Only Sir Galahad could wield the weapon at its full capacity.

Hence, why she could make use of its power in her conceptualized state. She could use the most powerful holy relic that could bring ruin to good and evil: the Real Lance of Longinus.

"Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy." Sir Galahad raised the spear and started to offer a prayer. "O Lord, bestow upon them your power. Grant them eternal rest and shine upon them that eternal light. Through the providence of your love, deliver them from the penalty of judgment. I pray from my heart that they receive the bliss of perpetual light."

A requiem offered to the dead. Crimson light showered the spear.

It was obviously some sort of disquieting power. Everyone spectating felt a chill down their spines as if they knew something terrible was about to happen.

Sir Galahad continued with the requiem…and the light gathering around the spear started to burn brighter, its glare intensifying.

It was like the world—and darkness itself—were burning bright red.

"Lord, bestow unto them peace—the Dolorous Stroke, Longinus Sin. Amen!"

Sir Galahad brought down the spear she held high.

It only took a moment for all this to happen. Lightning flashed in the sky, connecting heaven and earth, just like when the world was created.

Red lightning plunged down onto the main street, blowing back the curtain of night that had begun to fall on the city. It surged like a tidal wave, vaporizing the apparitions without a trace. One sudden move, and they were sent back to hell…

“Th-that was amazing…”

Everyone watching blinked in mute shock, stunned. Lightning had reached the front gate of Dark Castle Camelot…like the ocean of apparitions had been parted, like Moses and the Red Sea. It created a path from the bridge to the castle.

“Should be good enough.” Sir Galahad shouldered her spear as if it were nothing and turned to face them. “It obviously does nothing to the castle, but the main street should be clear for a while. How about we get going…? What’s wrong, Luna? Why’re you making that face?”

“I was briefed about it, but…I’m weirded out.” Luna looked critically at Sir Galahad. “I’ve always thought…you’re a real-life hack. Which cringey light novel did you come out of, Ms. Main Character? You’re so overpowered.”

“H-hey… That was uncalled for… I went to all that trouble, too…”

“Ugh…! We don’t have time to kill!” Felicia scolded their silly exchange. “This is our chance to invade that castle!”

“Yes,” said Sir Gawain. “The apparitions will come back with time. We need to go now!”

“The issue is what’s next. I hope things play out as you forecasted, Sir Dinadan,” Sir Mordred snapped.

“All we can do is pray.” Sir Dinadan shrugged.

“It’ll be fine, Sir Mordred!” Luna assured. “These kinds of ‘phony’ tacticians are spot-on when it counts! At least, in the world of games and manga!”

That made Sir Dinadan smile ruefully.

“All right! Well? Are you all ready?!” Luna pulled out her sword, collecting herself. Even though the sword was broken in half, there was something about it that seemed reliable.

“To save the world! Let’s head out!” Luna shouted. “Follow my lead!”

The group responded, launching toward the main street visible from the bridge tower.

“Whaaat?!” King Pellinore’s bellow rang through the trashed throne room.

The very impact of his voice wrecked the space further.

“Naaaagh! Unbelievable! Who thought they could fight like that? What *was* that?!”

They could see the outside world reflected in a window of light, made by Morgan's magic. That meant they all saw the cataclysmic strike that had just occurred.

"Hmph… The Dolorous Stroke, I see… Who would have dreamed there would be someone who had fully mastered the spear?" Sir Balin snorted.

King Arthur had pieced together everything from the attack. He seemed in good spirits somehow, breaking into a smile. "I knew you would come, Luna Artur."

"How did you know, my King?" Sir Balin asked.

"I suppose…it was in her eyes?" King Arthur remembered what she looked like. "When I broke her Excalibur, we determined who was the better king between us. But…her eyes didn't dull. In fact, they burned brighter, like she was powering up within."

"Wh-what? Did that happen? The enemy has gumption, it seems. I suppose she shares your blood. She reminds me of you in your younger days, King Arthur! Ha-ha-ha!" King Pellinore laughed loudly as if this was terribly funny.

"Don't let your emotions get ahold of you, King Pellinore," Sir Balin replied coolly as he turned again to King Arthur. "Oh, King Arthur. It's only a matter of time until they come, seeing there's a clear path to this castle… What should we do?"

"Hmm…" King Arthur thought as he watched the city burn from the Dolorous Stroke.

"Should we make our way out of the castle? Or should we receive them here? I'll follow any command. Seeing as I'm a sinner, I'm nothing more than a sword at your disposal."

King Arthur stood up quickly. "Let's head out to them. Sir Balin, King Pellinore, can I count on you?"

"As you wish, as you wish, as you wish! Gah-ha-ha! Battle time!" King Pellinore roared.

"…Yes, sire. Your wish is my command." Sir Balin respectfully kneeled.

"Dark Castle Camelot is the base of the Wild Hunt and the regulator of the magical ceremony. We might have magically boosted the exterior, but allowing the inside to be roughed up would pose problems… I'd like to keep the number of enemies inside the castle to a minimum." King Arthur looked at Mr. Kujou and Sir Lancelot. "…Can I count on you for the prior arrangements?"

"Yes, of course, King Arthur."

"As long as my current lord wills it."

"Thank you. I'm expecting great things," he said. "My sister. Morgan, my sister."

"…What?" Morgan snapped, not hiding her contempt.

"You stand by with me in this throne room. Is that fine by you?"

"…Fine. I mean, I am the only one who would be able to deal with a situation if something happened to this castle anyway," Morgan acquiesced reluctantly.

"Will the world meet its ruin or not…? Will the victor be the once king or the future king…? Will it be me or Luna? This is the turning point… Let's go!"

The knights who served as his soldiers all started to move. They were about to start the final fight of the King Arthur Succession Battle.

"Outta the way! Outta the way!"

With Luna at their head, the group charged forward, forward, forward.

The flames produced by Sir Kay's Lahat Chereb protected the group. The holy fire burned away the shadows preceding them like a tsunami, lighting the path opened by the Dolorous Stroke. They sprinted through the protected path. The apparitions congregating in the vicinity cowered under the flames, refusing to come closer. From across the fire, all they did was glare at Luna as she charged through the route that had been divided off. Occasionally, some of the apparitions didn't flinch at the sacred flames, standing in their way to attack them.

"Graaaaaaaah!" Like the wyvern that swooped down at them just now.

"Awooooooooo!" Like the cyclops that appeared from between the buildings to their right.

"…" Like the Dullahan that appeared to the left, charging them by chariot.

Those apparitions closed in on them from all three directions to quash them.

"Raaaaah! Get outta the way!"

"Haaaaah!"

Sir Gawain leaped high into the air, chopping off the wyvern's wings with his sword, and Felicia pierced its forehead without delay.

"Royal Road—Sword of Destruction!"

"Tsk!"

The towering cyclops was down—punctured by Sir Mordred's daggers and Misha's shots from her Excalibur.

"Hah!" Sir Palamedes had run up a building, leaping magnificently to decapitate the giant with a swing of his blade.

"Uh… You're in the way." *VWOOM!* Sir Galahad hit a home run with her sword.

The Dullahan soared into the sky, winking out with the stars.

"Ha-ha. Good work, vassals. My compliments to you," Luna bragged, continuing to sprint.

She ignored Misha over yonder, who angrily snapped, "Me? Your vassal?! Yeah, right!"

"I knew it… Those from the legendary era and their relatives are strong," Emma said, half impressed and half stunned. "Are all these

apparitions, like, monsters that would be considered the final boss in a story?"

"Humans have always had the potential to be just as powerful." Sir Galahad landed back down from the air, smiling, as she ran next to Luna. "But once civilization developed and humans became more influential, they became restricted by 'common sense'—a belief that this was all one person could do. We lost the power of individuality… We lost heroes. Nor sure if that's a good or bad thing."

"Well, it still makes you an overpowered hack, Sir Galahad." Luna seemed unamused.

"Ah-ha-ha. That's because I'm an exception. I'm a Good Samaritan and a perfect saint, so the gods are on my side."

"Sounds like a bunch of hooey…"

"Luna…you're so brave for charging through the apparitions…even under the flame's protection." Despite being selected by the sword of the most virtuous knight, Sir Kay seemed faint of heart as she glanced around their surroundings, trembling.

"What? You're such a chicken, Sir Kay," Luna scolded. "Get yourself together. If things go as Sir Dinadan expects, then we're close to…"

THUMP! Something tumbled from the sky and appeared before them.

The group who stopped for no apparitions halted here for the first time. Dust mushroomed on impact and eventually cleared. Before them was…

"I knew it…King Pellinore! Sir Balin!"

The two strongest knights of the original Round Table stood there.

"I shall not allow you to pass." Sir Balin quietly readied his two swords as the flames and wind tousled with his lion's mane of hair.

"If you wanna pass, you're gonna hafta force your way through!" King Pellinore thrust his enormous sword into the ground and howled, standing imposingly. The two men formed an impenetrable wall, which quashed the group's spirits.

"…They're here." Luna remembered what Sir Dinadan had said in their Round Table discussion.

"I heard that Dark Castle Camelot is their ceremonial base for the Wild Hunt. A common strat would be a siege battle—or for the enemy to retreat into the castle and divide us up for a brawl…but I imagine they won't want to risk damaging the inside of the castle if it's being used as the base for the ceremony.

"I think the enemy will come out to meet us. And we can use that as our chance."

"…What are we going to do, Luna?" asked Nayuki, readying herself.

Luna answered without missing a beat. "The Wild Hunt will occur when the clock strikes midnight… We either beat King Arthur before then or meet our end. We don't have time! Stick to the plan!" Luna held up her hand. "Sir Mordred! Sir Dinadan! Emma! Sir Percival! Head to the front! Do as discussed!"

“Hmph.”

“…Aw, man. I guess you’re doing the right thing, Luna.”

Sir Mordred and Sir Dinadan headed in front of Sir Balin.

“You got it!”

“Leave it to me!”

Emma and Sir Percival stood in front of King Pellinore.

“…You’re not all battling us? …I can’t believe I’m being disrespected like this.” Sir Balin seemed displeased as he scowled and stared down Sir Mordred. “And you’re pitting a royal traitor against me…! Are you trying to spite me? There will be a price to pay…!”

“Aaaaagh! Percival! My son!” King Pellinore looked at Sir Percival and yelled in delight. “I thought it might be you when I saw you from a distance. My heavens! You’ve become such a splendid knight! This pleases me!”

“…Father, it’s been too long. I’m sorry…”

“It’s fine! You don’t need to say a thing! It’s a knight’s greatest honor to use their life to serve their lord! Doesn’t matter if we’re father and son! Just think about carrying your sword to the battlefield and proclaiming your knighthood! Show me your skills!”

“…What’s wrong with this unbearable man…?” Emma asked.

“…He was born that way.” Sir Percival sighed and lowered his shoulders.

With King Pellinore, Emma, and Sir Percival before her, Felicia spoke to Sir Gawain, concerned about the hard look on his face. “…Sir Gawain.”

“It’s all right. I know, my liege,” Sir Gawain quietly answered. “King Pellinore is the confidant of my father, Lott… But that’s all in the past. I will let them deal with him.”

“You heard him. You guys handle the samurai pigs. We’ll be forging forward.” Luna grinned smugly.

“Fools. Have you forgotten how much more powerful we are?” Sir Balin took on an intimidating air, causing them to have goose bumps. “These wimps won’t buy you any time.”

“Yeah? Then let’s put that theory to the test.”

“…I hope you don’t regret it,” he spat. Sir Balin and King Pellinore were on the move.

“Haaaaaaaaaaah!” Sir Balin charged faster than a bolt of lightning.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah!” King Pellinore raged like a violent storm.

Their violence came so strong and swift that there was no room for argument.

The group was about to be blown to pieces, having no real way to fight back.

Claaaang!

“Gaaaaaaah!”

“What?!”

Sir Mordred’s dagger narrowly parried Sir Balin’s lightning-fast sword.

“Gaaaaaaaah!”

“Whaaaat?!”

Sir Percival's spear barely stopped King Pellinore's sword over their heads.

"Stoppppp!" *Flash.* A single strike from Emma's Excalibur.

"Heave-ho!" Sir Dinadan executed an unconventional blow.

They tried to battle King Pellinore and Sir Balin without hesitation.

"Tsk!" *Fwoosh!* Sir Balin vanished and dodged the attack.

"Harrrumph?!" King Pellinore didn't even bother to avoid Emma's attack and accepted the blow against his abs. "…Wow. That was unexpected."

"What's with you?"

King Pellinore and Sir Balin were legitimately bewildered.

"Strange," commented Sir Balin. "I thought you were nothing compared to us. But you're different from before: your movements, reflexes, swiftness, weight… What happened?"

"Nothing," Sir Galahad replied. "There isn't anything different in terms of physicality or abilities. I guess…I'd say their attitude has changed."

"Their attitude?"

"Have you already forgotten? This artificial island is almost a netherworld. And in a netherworld, mental fortitude carries more weight than raw power. Earlier, we were facing major uncertainty by the unexpected state of affairs and King Arthur, so we lost our psychological grit. But that's different now. We're going to save the world… That's why we're here on the battlefield. We're different now—attitude-wise."

"That can't explain all of it." Sir Balin's eyebrows knit together. "I can't imagine someone springing back into action after a mental breakdown…"

Right then, Sir Balin noticed something. In the middle of the enemy formation was…a single girl, hands on her hips, looking at them boldly. Luna.

"Don't tell me that girl breathed life back into those corpses?!"

"She has the making of a true king," Sir Galahad bragged, as if talking about herself. "I'm impressed, Luna. You found a way to survive this impossible battle. You make an amazing ruler." Sir Galahad praised her without any exaggeration.

"…Rintarou taught me how to do that." Luna closed her eyes for a moment, before looking straight at Sir Balin and King Pellinore. "Humans don't lose until they admit their defeat. And the chosen friends of a modern king would never lose to has-beens like you! Don't be so quick to judge us!"

"Tsk." Sir Balin clucked his tongue in irritation when Luna basically declared war.

"…Heh." Sir Galahad smiled brightly.

"I'm leaving the rest to you! Sir Mordred! Sir Dinadan! Emma! Sir Percival! You better win! Luna, out!"

With that, Luna, Sir Kay, Nayuki, Felicia, Sir Gawain, Misha, and Sir Palamedes raced toward the castle once again.

"Nice try!"

"Acting in a cliché is cowardice!"

Sir Balin and King Pellinore attempted to go after them.

“I’ll fight you, Sir Balin!” Sir Mordred was merciless as she brought down flashing metal daggers on him.

“I won’t let you go—on my life!” Emma’s replica Excalibur tore through the air.

“Tsk?!”

“Nuaaaaah?!”

They made Sir Balin take his distance and pressed King Pellinore back, and Luna’s group made it out of there.

“Hmmm?! Even a replica of our King’s Excalibur delivers! Ow! That hurt a little!” King Pellinore shrieked.

“Gah…I will never forgive you, Sir Mordred…! Not with that Excalibur that mocks our king…!”

They had reached an impasse. It seemed King Pellinore and Sir Balin finally understood that they needed to fight. Militancy and murderous animosity were budding between them.

Sir Mordred began to talk to Emma next to her. “Let’s do this. If we lose, then Luna’s group will be attacked from behind. We can’t fall here… Don’t die on us, Emma!”

“Obviously! …You know, *you* tried to kill me once yourself!”

“D-do we have to talk about that *now*?!”

They bantered, even as they anticipated their battle to the death.

Sir Mordred, Emma, Sir Dinadan, and Sir Percival each faced their selected opponent and started their charge.

They were running, sprinting through the streets.

“…We’re almost at the castle!”

After leaving their companions to fight Sir Balin and King Pellinore, Luna’s group closed the distance to Dark Castle Camelot. When they looked up, its specter—which had seemed distant and small—towered over them.

“We can do this! There are no apparitions after us, either… If we keep this up…!”

“Stop, Sir Kay! You’re gonna jinx us!” Luna warned her.

Thump, thump, thump… They could hear the ground groaning from a distance, a sign that something powerful was approaching.

BOOOOOOOOOM! A blast blew up the building facing the road.

A gigantic shadow stood in their way.

“ROOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAR!”

“The Questing Beast?!”

“See, Sir Kay? You’re so stupid, dummy!” Luna shouted.

“And this is *my* fault?”

Luna clutched her head as the Questing Beast appeared in front of her and Sir Kay. It stared down upon the tiny humans as though it had some clear purpose and postured itself low to imply it wouldn’t allow them to pass…

“Fine…” Sir Galahad manifested her weapons—David’s Sword in her right hand and the Real Lance of Longinus in her left. She wore Joseph of Arimathea’s Shield on her back.

Equipped with the relics obtained on her adventures besides Lahat Chereb, Sir Galahad stepped in front of the beast.

“This monster is the physical incarnation of kingdom ruin… I’m the only one who could fight against it…normally.”

But someone else had stopped Sir Galahad, holding her back with a hand. Sir Palamedes.

“You can’t, Sir Galahad. Even a saint can’t destroy the concept of ruin. Didn’t Sir Dinadan tell you? We can’t have our strongest fighter be held up here.”

“Sir Palamedes…”

“Let’s go with Sir Dinadan’s plan. I think I ought to do it, considering the fate I shared with the Questing Beast in life… Are you fine with that, Misha?”

“Hmph!” Misha responded. “My Excalibur is best used for drawing the enemy’s attention and buying time… If that’s the best strategy to deal with the situation, I’ll do it!” She snorted disapprovingly and turned away.

“…You heard her. Leave this to us. You go ahead.”

“Are you sure? Luna, I think that the Questing Beast should be fought with more people…” Nayuki seemed anxious.

“Sir Palamedes… Misha…”

Even though this was the plan, they were realizing just how big this beast was. The fight seemed pointless. Luna didn’t know what to say to the pair who were about to face death. She squeezed her eyes tight and then opened them.

“I believe in the two of you! So I’m counting on you guys!”

Misha froze in spite of herself. “Hm-hmph! So what are you waiting for?! Hurry up and get! And remember, I don’t consider you a king! I’m only doing this because it makes the most sense! Don’t get the wrong idea!”

“Misha.”

“When this is over, I’m going to duel you for the throne. Hurry and go crush that unhinged king and screw up his Wild Hunt! Got it?! That’s my royal command!” Misha barked.

“…Yes, I’m counting on you here, Misha!” Luna replied, starting to run.

But of course, something tried to stand in her way.

“ROOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAR!” The Questing Beast stamped at the ground and charged.

“Let’s go for it, Sir Palamedes!”

“Yes, let’s, my modern-day lord!”

Misha and Sir Palamedes met the Questing Beast.

Luna’s group passed the Questing Beast and kept running and running and running.

Then, finally…

"…We made it!"

Luna's group was at the front gate of Dark Castle Camelot…which opened up to a sprawling plaza.

In full effect were Sir Galahad's Longinus Sin and Sir Kay's Lahat Chereb. The plaza was blazing from the holy red flames. There wasn't even a single apparition around.

They tried to charge right into the castle…but the final guard stood in their way.

"…Been a while, Luna Artur."

"Mr. Kujou?! Sir Lancelot?!"

Luna was stunned to see them standing in front of the castle gate.

"King Arthur will prepare his rear guard for the final battle. We need to be careful of Sir Balin, King Pellinore, and the Questing Beast, but…we should be prepared for one last threat. I doubt King Arthur would be unprepared, now that we're on the grand stage.

"It's integral we don't use our strongest powers until we pull them onto the stage."

"…I knew we'd have more people to deal with, but…" Luna looked bitter as she recalled Sir Dinadan's warning…

"F-Father…?!"

"…"

Sir Galahad faced Sir Lancelot…her father from her past life. She couldn't hide her distress.

"So you were alive, Mr. Kujou… I was sure I'd blown you away with my Excalibur."

"Thanks for that."

Luna's former teacher smiled somewhat coldly. If they were here, she didn't need to ask them why.

Mr. Kujou's group was on King Arthur's side.

They'd miscalculated things. They knew something would happen, but they had vastly underestimated their opponent's powers. They never expected Souma Kujou and Sir Lancelot.

Luna gritted her teeth, facing her enemies.

"Mr. Kujou… I knew you were a villain who wanted to win the succession battle by killing everyone off, but…don't you see what you're trying to do?!" Luna yelled, snapping at him. "I'm just going to be blunt here: King Arthur is on the dark side! If you follow him, the Catastrophe will happen, and the world will be destroyed! Wouldn't that be bad for you, too?!"

"…"

"I know we have bad blood between us, but…we shouldn't be fighting each other! We should join together temporarily and beat the crap out of King Arthur!"

"You're the one who doesn't get it, Luna Artur." Mr. Kujou shrugged Luna off with a smile. "I never was interested in becoming a king."

"What?!"

“I don’t care about the future. You might wonder why I was trying to be king then. I thought I might have been able to save someone—someone I want to save.”

“…What…? There’s someone you want to save?”

“I figured out that I can save her if I destroy the world. So I’ll do it. Simple as that.”

“…I don’t know what kind of situation you’re in, but…” Luna realized there was no use in trying to understand. “If you saved this person through these means…will they be happy?”

“Probably not. She would never be happy, I imagine… She might scorn and hate me, but that doesn’t matter.”

Ka-shink. Mr. Kujou drew his Excalibur—a sword ominously shaped as if to reflect his own twistedness.

“But I want her to live. Such is the nature of the ego.”

“…Gah.”

There was a wild gleam in his pitch-black eyes, but something in it seemed genuine. There was no way to avoid the fight—no amount of persuasion would reach him.

Mr. Kujou’s Excalibur had a power that spelled certain victory—it always would exceed the strength of his opponents. In other words, he was the worst possible matchup for Sir Galahad, who was the strongest in individual power. Since he was always more powerful than his challenger, he was difficult to defeat. He would delay their advance.

Plus, Luna’s Excalibur was the only thing effective against him, and it was gone.

The fight was going to be a frantic one. And a waste of time. They shouldn’t have put it past King Arthur to use the best rear guard in this state.

The moon was illuminated red by the flames over their heads. It was almost the next day.

We don’t have time, but it would suck if Mr. Kujou and Sir Lancelot got us from behind as we invaded the castle… All of us need to fight here…!

Luna and Sir Galahad prepared themselves to join the battle.

…Gwoosh… Felicia’s, Sir Gawain’s, Mr. Kujou’s, and Sir Lancelot’s forms started to ripple.

“Felicia?!”

“…I’ve cast a *Netherworld Transformation*. I can’t banish just our opponents into that space, but I can suck all of us into that world. But this transformation will only last a few minutes. In that time, Luna, you must…”

Luna shouted when she realized what Felicia was trying to do. “Wh-what are you doing?! You can’t mean…?!”

“Sir Gawain and I are going to take them on. If Mr. Kujou is going to be more powerful than his opponent, it won’t matter who goes up against him. So we should fight Mr. Kujou—Lord Gloria—since I can use my fairy magic. Is that okay with you, Sir Gawain?”

“…Of course.” Sir Gawain responded, voice thick with emotion. “I think… No, I’m *sure* I came to this world for this day.”

Sir Gawain stared straight ahead. “…” He stared at Sir Lancelot, his close friend and greatest rival. “We haven’t crossed swords since…that battle in France, was it?”

“…I suppose that’s right.”

“How ironic… Back then, you were on the side of justice, protecting your home nation and the queen.”

“You have justice on your side right now, as someone protecting the world. It seems our positions have reversed.”

The two of them slowly readied their swords. Sir Gawain’s Galatine. Sir Lancelot’s Arondight. The pair of sibling swords were opposing each other in this final battlefield.

Words were no longer needed. Their spines said it all.

“Now, Luna! While you still can.”

“… Felicia…” Luna looked at Felicia, her best friend, the one who always thought of her and the one who remained on her side.

“…Why’re you looking at me like we’ll never see each other again? I don’t have any intention of dying.”

“B-but…!”

“As long as you beat King Arthur.”

“…?!” Luna balled her hand into a fist as Felicia faded into the other world…slowly.

Mr. Kujou didn’t fight it. It seemed he was accepting Felicia’s proposed match.

“Luna…this is…,” Nayuki said.

“Yes, Luna. We can’t let Felicia’s and Sir Gawain’s resolve go to waste,” Sir Kay added.

“… Felicia!” Luna shouted.

“What?”

“You better not die! Until I give King Arthur a whupping! You better survive!”

“…I know.” Felicia giggled, and then they slipped into the netherworld.

Luna stood in that spot in a daze, speechless for several seconds.

“…Let’s go!”

“Yes!”

“Let’s win this!”

Luna, Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad entered Dark Castle Camelot at last.

CHAPTER 4

All Their Battles

They were running, feet pounding through the inside of the castle—dashing through halls, running up stairs, heading to the top.

They went up—earnestly up—resting not for a second and continuing to sprint.

Something popped into Luna's mind.

"In a one-on-one fight, Luna, there's no need to win. Well, I don't think you have a chance at winning, even if you boost your abilities and put up a good fight. As we know, the enemy is all-powerful. We might beat them down one by one if we fight as a group…but we won't make it on time. Tomorrow is ever closer. The enemy doesn't need to defeat us. If they could buy enough time, the Wild Hunt will begin. They will have won.

"The most integral part of the plan is that we go up against King Arthur with Luna, the one who isn't intimidated by him, and Sir Galahad, the strongest one. We need you not to sustain any real wounds and conserve as many of our fighters as possible until then. I know this sounds like an average plan, but we need to split our forces to whittle down his supporters. Those divided will devote themselves to keeping the enemy forces at bay and buying time.

"We'll give you a chance to conquer King Arthur… That's the only way we can do this. To put it bluntly, we need sacrifices. Since we're limited on time, I could only think of one plan that could possibly result in victory.

"The question is: Are you ready to go through with this reckless strategy and risk losing some peers…? No, that's not it. I guess it's 'Do you trust us to put our lives on the line to grant you a chance to move ahead with the plan?'"

"Thank you, Sir Dinadan… I'm glad we're on the same team. With my pea brain, I doubt I would have come up with such a bold strategy." Luna thought over his advice, hand forming a fist. "We've cast the dice. All I can do is live up to your expectations!"

Luna unlocked her phone and looked at the time. One hour until midnight.

Whether she liked it or not, that was when it would all end.

…It's a surprise and a blessing that there hasn't been a single apparition in the castle.

There hadn't been a solitary snare blocking their way as they ran through the hushed hallways and up the steps… After doing that dozens of times, they finally made it to their destination.

"…"

In front of them, there was a giant door so large they needed to crane their necks to look at it. The highest floor of Dark Castle Camelot—the throne room.

He was there. She could feel that in her soul. King Arthur, the once savior of humanity, now demon lord trying to destroy the world. He was on the other side. She was certain of his presence. It might have been because they shared blood, though they were distant relatives.

Ba-dmp, ba-dmp, ba-dmp… Heart pounding for many reasons, Luna took a breath to steady her heart, bracing herself to push open the door.

"Hey… Glad you made it."

Deep into the room was King Arthur, sitting majestically on his throne.

"Now that's unexpected… Based on your personality, I thought you'd never risk losing your friends… Maybe someone planted a different idea in your head? Sir Dinadan, perhaps?"

"…" Luna remained silent as she stared at King Arthur.

"…Ha-ha."

Then she noticed the presence of the dark witch, wearing a small smile and waiting by the side.

"Is that the dark witch that Sir Lamorak defeated…?"

"I guess this is my chance to introduce myself… Luna Artur." The witch took a step forward, pinching the hem of her robe to curtsy. "Morgan le Fay… King Arthur's half sister…"

"… Morgan…?!"

"Oh, right. Or maybe it's better if I introduce myself like this… It's me, Tsugumi Mimori."

"Huh?!" Luna opened her eyes wide and stared at her.

Since the witch had used *Identity Masking* up to that moment, the two faces hadn't matched until then. Now they converged.

"Tsugumi…?! …I see. So that's what's been going on." Luna pieced it together. "So everything was in the palm of your hand…"

"Not really… I mean, you're standing in front of me, after all." Morgan looked at Luna, somewhat displeased. "I worked so hard to get Rintarou Magami to realize he was Merlin, which reinforced his curse to kill King Arthur. According to fate, you'd be erased from this world by Rintarou Magami… We're one step away from getting that to happen."

Luna remembered the unimaginable fight that had occurred between her and Rintarou during the quest for the Holy Grail.

"Yet you're here… What does that mean? Can a simple human override divine will…?"

"…Divine will? What are you talking about?"

"Don't you get it, Luna?" Equipped with her relic trifecta, Sir Galahad stared at the witch. "Morgan le Fay. Morrigan, the youngest of the Three Goddesses of Fate… The protector of humans made enemy of humanity, making her the traitor who colluded with Balor."

“?!” Luna was too surprised to say anything.

Ignoring her, Sir Galahad pointed the tip of her sword at Morgan. “The other two Goddesses of Fate—Lady Badb and Lady Macha—will not forgive you. I’m sure it was by their will that I stayed behind in this world to serve as Luna’s Jack. Morgan le Fay. No, Morrigan, I swear on the names of the goddesses that I will defeat you.”

“Hmph… The goddess’s mutt sure loves to bark, it seems. You were divinely conceived to be the holiest saint. Do you really think someone made by the gods could win against a goddess? A creation will never conquer its creator.”

Daggers shot between Sir Galahad and Morgan as they glared at each other.

“Oh my. Seems things are getting amped up…” King Arthur appeared to be enjoying the show, smiling to himself. “Well, Luna.” He turned to face Luna’s group directly again. “Doesn’t this remind you of a cliché final battle between heroes and the last boss?” he joked.

Luna scowled.

“I think I’m supposed to say: ‘Heroes, you’re here. I’m the king among kings—the demon lord. I’ve been waiting for you, waiting for someone like you to appear… If you join my side, I’ll give you half the world. What do you say? Will you join me?’”

“…?!”

“The world will be painted over once we start the Wild Hunt. All existing boundaries will be rendered meaningless. We’ll begin an era of survival of the fittest—might will make right, just like the era of legends. Balor backs me. The only resister—Lugh, god of light from the Dananns—can’t do anything from Tir na Nog. I bet you can guess who’ll rule the world post-Catastrophe…”

Luna continued to remain silent.

“Now that you know, I have a question for you, Luna… Will you join me and take half the world? What’s your reply?”

“The answer’s nope.” Luna did not hesitate in the slightest.

“Ah-ha-ha. Of course. That’s what you should say as the hero trying to save the world…” King Arthur seemed satisfied…

“I don’t want half the world. I want it all,” she said.

King Arthur’s eyes went wide. “What?”

“You heard me. I want it all. I want everything. I’m no hero of justice—I’m the king. I’m good at being the best and *only* king. If that’s not on the table, there’s nothing to negotiate.”

“Well, so um…?”

“Oh, I get it! You can’t handle ruling the whole world by yourself? Heh-heh-heh. I suppose you couldn’t. I mean, you’re a pathetic pushover who surrendered to sorry old Balor. Fine! I’ll blast you away, shoo off Balor, and conquer the world on my own!” Luna drew and readied her sword—her broken Excalibur. Somehow, it didn’t seem sad or sorry in Luna’s hands.

“*Siiigh…* Such a reckless girl, this descendant of mine…” Even King Arthur scratched his head and winced.

“… Luna… Even in this situation…,” Sir Kay mumbled.

“Ah-ha-ha, I suppose you’ve always been this way, Luna…,” Nayuki said.

They seemed slightly disconcerted.

“I wanted to avoid hurting my descendants if I could help it…but I’m the demon lord now. I was summoned here at that request, so I can’t resist my purpose. All I can do is perform my role.”

King Arthur unsheathed his sword. *Shing*, screeched the true Excalibur, displaying its might to them all. Its sublime light flooded the throne room.

“Come at me, Luna Artur. You have to properly succeed my throne. If you want to become a king to save the world like me, you’ve got to surpass me, the one trying to ruin it.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice!” Luna shouted.

The throne room changed. The whole world changed. It burst into flames the color of the sunset.

“Uh?!” She realized a golden beach spread out before her—a coastline of some small island somewhere.

To her right, the horizon was burning red from the setting sun. In the center of the island—lush and green—was a white temple, glowing divinely in the distance. Everything shimmered under the sunset, like this was a dream or paradise.

“The legendary island of Avalon.” Morgan’s voice echoed. “The place where the Arthurian legend ends, where King Arthur made his way, wounded in his battle at Camlann, to heal his injuries so he could someday return, and where he went into an eternal rest.”

“…You’ve changed the battlegrounds using your *Netherworld Transformation…*?!”

“Exactly. There’s no more appropriate place for this final fight, right?”

Luna realized Morgan’s form had transformed—from a witch to a warrior. She wore a crimson dress decorated with the plumage of a black crow, ebony armor, and an ashen cape. Black hair swept to her feet. Her graceful hands held spears—one red and one white, both looking ominous.

Her aura—black and divine—could have intimidated the faint of heart with just one look.

One of the Three Goddesses of Fate. A goddess of war presiding over destruction, slaughter, revenge, and victory. A divine presence born from concepts of supremacy and authority.

The strongest goddess of Celtic mythology used her sixth sense and magic to rule over all conceivable battles. Humans robbed her of her divinity until she’d been degraded into a witch or monster—until she had become a goddess out of luck.

Queen Morrigan the Great. Morgan le Fay.

Manifesting here and now was the oldest goddess of war in human history.

“It’s been so long since I’ve returned to this body… That means the borders between the real world and the illusory world have begun to fuse on this island.” Morgan snickered, bewitchingly and ghastly. It was a chuckle cold enough to lower the temperature to absolute zero. “Don’t think I’ll play nice like before, now that I’m in this body…”

“…Don’t lose heart, Luna.” Sir Galahad stepped forward in front of Morgan.

David’s Sword, the Real Lance of Longinus, and Joseph of Arimathea’s Shield released a holy light, as if to fight against Morgan’s foul divinity.

“I’ll hold back Morrigan. You take King Arthur, Luna.”

“I know! Leave him to me! Sir Kay! Nayuki! Let’s get going!” Luna raised her broken sword and charged at him.

“Got it, Luna!” Sir Kay yelled.

“Roger!” Nayuki cried, following her.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” Morgan laughed, flashing the crimson spear in her hand.

Magical Celtic Ogham letters zipped through the open air. Dark magic was instantly cast, and shadows spread like sludge toward Luna to obstruct her.

“Nuh-uh—Lahat Chereb!” Sir Kay swung Lahat Chereb as hard as she could—the gleaming flames wrapped around and cut through the darkness to open a way out for Luna.

“Little shrew! That’s enough!”

Morgan, however, didn’t stop her shrill laughter. The white spear in her left hand flashed, and a murder of crows appeared from out of nowhere. These were no regular birds, but phantom crows of darkness created from shadows and chaos itself.

They flocked together until they practically filled Luna’s vision. They pursued her as if preparing to peck and consume her.

“Haaaaah!” This time, Nayuki released an icy wave and intercepted them.

The air instantly froze, giving the scene a dreamlike glow under the dusk. The arctic blast flung the crows off Luna’s back. Using this opportunity, Luna lunged toward King Arthur, who had thrust his sword into the sand of the beach, holding it in both hands.

CLANG! Air waves gusted above. Two shadows crossed above Luna’s head.

“I won’t let you get Luna!” Sir Galahad flipped through the air upside down as she swung her sword and spear.

“Such sly children…!” Morgan swung her two spears, flying like an acrobat.

Sir Galahad had intercepted the skyward assault on Luna’s blind spot. Then the knight and witch aimed for each other, trading skilled blows as they fell from the sky. Their crashing blades were constant like background music.

“Aaaaaaaaah!” Luna came close enough to King Arthur to reach him with her sword. She swung her broken Excalibur with as much force as she could muster.

“Now, come.” King Arthur pulled out his true Excalibur thrust into the beach.

The two weapons crossed in the twilight.

The impact shook Avalon. The force turned up wind that swirled around the two. Over met swords, Luna and King Arthur glared at each other.

“Oh? Your Excalibur won’t break any further, I guess… Too bad. Wait—” King Arthur grinned. “Are you stronger than before?”

“Obviously!”

“Why?”

“Isn’t that obvious?!” Luna didn’t want to lock swords any longer, using momentum to send King Arthur’s sword soaring.

Shiiing! An earsplitting crash. Sparks burst.

“I’m going to become the king—the greatest one in the world! I’m going to become a true ruler who surpasses you! Otherwise, I can’t show my face to him!”

“—?!” King Arthur leaped back, as if overpowered by her energy…

Luna didn’t miss a beat. Surrounded by a gust of wind, she struck the retreating king…

“Hiiiiiii-yaaaaaah!”

Luna cut deep and fast into King Arthur.

—

“Royal Road—Sword of Destruction!” Sir Mordred screamed as she ran across the wall of a building.

Daggers turned into shooting stars and assaulted Sir Balin…but moving at lightning-fast speed was his specialty.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!” Without slowing down, he twirled his swords, flicking away, shooting back, and smashing the daggers to pieces. “You shrew!”

Sir Balin closed the distance between them in an instant.

“Diiiiiiiiiiie!” He positioned his swords like a pair of level scissors, trying to send her neck flying.

“Gaaaaah!”

Shiiing! It was just a hair’s breadth. Sir Mordred instantly unsheathed a white sword to hold back the fulcrum of the scissors and prevent her head from being taken off.

Only in form, it was Clarent, repaired, the *Silver Successor of King’s Blood*.

“Nnnnnugh?! That’s…!”

“Haaaaah!”

A hoof hit the ground. Something massive charged at Sir Balin from the side. Sir Dinadan, mounted on a war horse. Sir Dinadan led the horse, sending a spear toward Sir Balin.

“Tsk!” Sir Balin knew he wouldn’t be able to take a spear charged by the horse’s momentum. He jumped away from Sir Mordred to dodge it.

“Up we go!” Sir Dinadan reined the pony, making it leap. It landed on the roof of a nearby building. “Man, this horse that Nayuki summoned from the legendary era is a fine steed.”

“Right, Sir Dinadan… You were always good at jousting… That was your only forte…”

“As long as I’m on horseback, I wouldn’t lose, even to Lancy or Trist. But I’m a sorry state when it comes to battles on foot.”

The two engaged in casual conversation.

“You…!” Sir Balin roared, angry. “So the royal traitor brings a horse to a battle on foot. No pride, it seems… Oh, how the Round Table has fallen!” Sir Balin readied himself, lower and deeper than before.

It was almost as though he were a ferocious predator targeting his prey.

“I will never forgive you. I, Balin le Savage, will execute the boors for all the wrongs done to the king…! That is my atonement! The single service by which I can repay my king!”

“Hmph,” Sir Mordred said self-derisively. “You’re just like the old me, Sir Balin.”

“Excuse you? You liken me to a traitor like you?” Sir Balin scowled.

“Didn’t you commit crimes during your life? You killed King Arthur’s benefactor, murdered your fellow knights, ruined a kingdom… You’ve spit in the king’s face, even when it felt inauthentic to you. It was an unfortunate fate you couldn’t rebel against.”

“…Gh?!”

“You swore loyalty to King Arthur more than anyone. I imagine the only one you can’t forgive is yourself. Are you sure you want to swing your sword in service of *that* King Arthur? For that pitiful thing whose true nature is unrecognizable now?”

“Are you making a mockery of my king…?! A traitor has no right to say that!”

“Nothing will come from being a prisoner to your past sins and obsessions! I was taught that by Merlin…by Rintarou Magami!” Sir Mordred held her Sword of Destruction and Clarent in her hands as she charged at Sir Balin.

A host of daggers flashed around her as she slashed at Sir Balin.

“I’ll overcome my sinful past and fight to clear a path to the future! That’s the reason I swing my sword!” Sir Mordred barreled into him.

“Hraaaaagh!” Sir Percival leaped into the air with all his might, wielding Klingsor.

The silver spear hit King Pellinore with the speed and power of a rail gun. Light flashed. A shock wave diffused. The buildings around them were blown up into rubble.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! That was a big blow! That smarted a bit, son!” King Pellinore looked like he hadn’t even borne the attack, rushing Sir Percival like a tank engine off its tracks.

“Gah… Shi…!” Sir Percival was rendered immobile after unleashing his biggest trick.

“Take that!” King Pellinore violently brought down his large sword from over his head.

“Stoppppp!” Emma beat him to the chase, cutting in. “Royal Road—Slashing Sword!”

She used her Royal Road, driving her sword into King Pellinore’s chest. The raised sword gleamed, burning away the night. Emma was known as the best sword fighter among Kings. That was a critical hit.

According to the legends, the blade could slice through all substances known to man, but it didn’t leave a wound even a fraction of an inch deep on King Pellinore.

“Th-that couldn’t possibly… Why…?!”

“Feeeble!” King Pellinore swept his large sword from the side.

Emma immediately met his blade. “Aaaaaaaah?!” She was sent flying like a baseball, right into a building, which collapsed on impact.

“…Guh.” She somehow got up by using her sword as a cane, but she was a mess.

“Emma?! Are you all right?!” Sir Percival readied his spear and stood to protect her.

King Pellinore called out to her. “Emma, is it?! You don’t have the guts to stand on this battlefield! Withdraw!”

“…?!” Emma stopped coughing, opening her eyes wide and freezing in place.

“One glance, and I knew! You’re the weakest one in the King Arthur Succession Battle!” King Pellinore turned the point of his sword at her. “Flimsy blade! Without your little tricks, you lack the ambitions to be king! Nothing about you is inspiring. You don’t have the magnetism that makes all yield to your power! The king’s sword is no cheap trick! Your sword’s strength signifies *your* power! That’s what charges our swings! That’s what makes it hefty, so others won’t dare to approach you!”

“Wh-what…?!”

“Little lass! Your swordsmanship is magnificent, I admit, though you’re an enemy! You might have passed for someone in the era of ancients! But you’re empty! A borrowed mission, a borrowed reason, a borrowed sword! You refined your technique based on what others told you to do! You’re an empty husk! I know, because I’m a weak king myself, though I’ve sworn my allegiance to King Arthur! As proof, I came out unscathed from a blow delivered by the Slashing Sword replica! Your feathery blade tells me your whole story!”

Emma couldn’t refute him, going silent and hanging her head. The tip of her sword drooped down.

“Battles aren’t about using clever little tricks! They’re all about raw power! Power against power—now that’s a real battle! So withdraw! Your flimsy blade won’t harm me, even if you hit me a million times! Be obedient and let me spar my own son! Gwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“Gah… Father… You pig…” Sir Percival’s face twisted in hate. “…Emma, don’t let this guy get to you. This is just his personality…” He tried to do something to get Emma standing back up again, but…

“…Emma?”

Emma had passed by Sir Percival, unsteady on her feet. “…You’re right. King Pellinore,” she muttered, head hanging still. “I have no sense of self. I tried to become king and fought—to do what I was told. I don’t have anything that I want to accomplish as king. I don’t even care about saving the world… And I still feel that way, even though the world is about to end.”

“Oh?”

“My sword *is* flimsy… You’re right. But…”

Emma lifted her head and looked straight at King Pellinore. For some reason, she thought of Sir Lamorak—maybe because King Pellinore and Sir Percival were related to her former Jack.

Sir Lamorak...

The knight had been saddled with a darkness that no ordinary person could understand. She had been terribly at odds with it, even suffering because of it. She wasn’t evil by nature. That was why she’d acted so kindly toward Emma, always seeking a path and something to rely on. That was why she wielded her sword.

...Now that I think about it, Sir Lamorak was on the same boat as me... Just like I blindly tried to become king, she didn’t know what to do with her life... But right now, I’m...

Emma felt like she had almost caught sight of something—of the path she was meant to take and one she wanted to go down. It was what she should have used to order her Jack as King.

“...Even this flimsy sword has some willpower behind it right now.”

“Oh?!” asked King Pellinore.

“Even if the world were to end, I would never do anything that would make me ashamed to face my master… He offered a hand to someone as shallow as me…! Rintarou told me to think about what I live for… He said he would help me figure it out… He gave me a place to belong…! And I cherish it! That’s why I’ll fight to protect this world, even if my blade is weak!”

Emma readied her sword. Watch over me, Sir Lamorak. I don’t care even if I don’t become the king...I’m going to use this sword to clear the way to my path in life!

Emma prepared herself mentally, unyielding and undeterred, as she pinned a stare at the mighty King Pellinore.

“…” King Pellinore went silent for a while… “Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! That’s more like it!” he roared, looking delighted. “Seems you have it in you!

You've got it! That's the spirit! I apologize for my insults! I'll reflect on my actions! You may engage in battle with me! Now show me how much weight you can put behind that feathery sword!" he roared. "Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

King Pellinore started to charge at Emma and Sir Percival like a tank engine.

"Hi-yaaaaah!" Emma placed all her cultivated skills and all her weight—her mental fortitude—in the tip of her sword as she met King Pellinore.

"Yaaaaaaaah!"

"Fwwwwh!"

Jumping from building to building, Felicia and Mr. Kujou crossed swords.

Felicia thrust her blade, slicing through the air, raising it above her head to make it come crashing down hard. Mr. Kujou repelled it, sword flashing from the side as he slashed up a storm.

Felicia's rapier and Mr. Kujou's long sword clashed, creating shock waves. At first glance, it looked like they were a decent match, but…

"I knew this was all you could do!" Mr. Kujou's switchback was violent.

"Uh?!" Missing the chance to parry, Felicia's entire body went flying before falling fast at a forty-five-degree angle. She was hammered into the wall of a building, which started to collapse.

"Gah?! *Cough?!*" Felicia instantly kicked off the falling rubble, narrowly escaping with her life.

Even though all her bones had been fractured, *Spring's Abundant Harvest Wind*—fairy magic—cloaked Felicia in its glitter and healed her broken bones. But the recovery hurt like hell. Her face twisted as she was unable to do anything except wait for the process to finish.

"…You're not enough to take me on… Don't you get it, Felicia?" Mr. Kujou leaped down to stand in front of her.

The sword in his hand was the Military Conquest Steel Sword. Blessed with the power to exceed his opponent, it was the strongest Excalibur of them all.

"I think I know what you're trying to do. You're trying to buy time as Luna attacks the castle… Right?"

"Obviously. That's why I'm going to engage with you as long as I live, Lord Gloria…" Felicia wiped away the blood on her mouth and readied her sword.

She had long since invoked her Royal Road, which emitted a radiance that dulled her opponent's power and movements.

"I see. So you're desperately trying to get at my level… What a horrible miscalculation." Mr. Kujou raised his own sword.

The Military Conquest Steel Sword. It spelled certain victory in a one-on-one battle.

"Try all you want to weaken my power. My sword always creates a fixed difference in power between us. It allows me to overpower you… You can't reverse that outcome—ever."

“…It does seem that way, doesn’t it…?” Felicia allowed her eyes to dart to the side.

“Sir Lancelooot?!”

“Sir Gawain!”

The two knights were trading blows like never seen before. Maybe trading blows was the wrong way to describe it, seeing as one knight was doing most of the trading.

Sir Gawain was swinging his sword with terrifying force, rushing in like a storm that threatened to leave everyone dead in its wake. On the other hand…

“Hmph.” Sir Lancelot indifferently handled the blows with his sword and thrust his blade, hewing away at Sir Gawain in an artful manner.

Whenever Sir Gawain swung, Sir Lancelot’s counterattack would gouge into him. Even though he was drenched in blood, Sir Gawain would not falter. Every time he strengthened his blows, Sir Lancelot would use that power to his advantage and counter.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!” Sir Gawain hollered even louder, attacking the other knight.

As they crossed swords, they faced each other and shouted.

“Ha-ha-ha! This unbalanced battle…! Reminds me of our three-day battle in France…! Oh, memories!”

“You’re wrong…!” Sir Lancelot parried Sir Gawain’s sword and thrust at the knight’s shoulder. “You seem completely different…!”

“Nothing’s changed! I could never reach you! Just like now!”

“You’re wrong…!”

Ga-shiiiiing! Sir Gawain and Sir Lancelot had started to fight at close range.

“…I was jealous of you, Sir Lancelot… I worshipped you.”

“…”

“I wanted to become a knight who could stand by you… I wanted to win against you.”

“…”

“But nothing worked. I couldn’t reach your level in fame or in King Arthur’s trust. Because of that…I took the wrong path. I ended up taking a different road from you. Because I’m weak.”

“…”

“Look…I was summoned to this world, and I’ve fought alongside Felicia…and that made me realize it again… There is something that matters more than prestige or winning or losing—something more precious than those things.”

“…”

“When I realized that… I felt like I had gotten closer to reaching your level.”

“…”

“I fight for Felicia. I fight for this world. Just as you fought in the legendary era…for the king, for the queen, for the country… You know, you were always fighting for someone.”

“…”

“Hey, Sir Lancelot, you’re my greatest rival and my eternal goal. I wish… you would remain far from my reach forever. I wish I could continue chasing after you. I don’t want to see you feel bad about yourself and the Round Table or resentful of the world! I want you to be someone I aspire to forever! So—”

Everything went down in an instant. Sir Lancelot forcibly unlocked their swords and struck at Sir Gawain. It sounded like a thunderbolt assaulted him. He barely managed to defend himself in time.

“…That’s enough humoring you for now,” spat Sir Lancelot after leaping to take his distance.

He wasn’t ridiculing Sir Gawain…so much as he was trying to drown him out.

“I can’t go back to who I used to be!” he said. “I *will* grant Lord Kujou’s and King Arthur’s wishes. With the way I am now, that’s all I have left! I’ve failed to protect the things I wanted to! What other choice do I have?!”

“Sir Lancelot…!” Sir Gawain smiled unexpectedly. “I’ve never…wanted to win against you more than at this very moment.”

“Hmm? Didn’t you just tell me you have something that’s more important than winning?”

“Yeah! But right now…right now…I need to win against you! So I can remain being who I am! And most importantly, for your sake!”

“Then try…if you can!”

Once again, Sir Gawain and Sir Lancelot began their fight.

Watching the two knights from afar, Mr. Kujou turned back to Felicia.

“…It’s ironic, Felicia Ferald.”

“What’s ironic?”

“Can’t you see? …We’re the winners. You’re the losers.”

“What?!”

“In the past, Sir Gawain was defeated by Sir Lancelot. In the past, you were defeated by me… Isn’t it ironic how we’re matched up this way? You’re both losers.”

When he pointed out the simple truth, Felicia seemed to lose her ability to speak.

“Did you already forget? You used to genuinely fear me. *You* were the one surrendered, but you tried to butter me up and form a fake alliance to pretend you had done neither of those things… Remember?”

Felicia was silent. It confirmed he was right.

“And now, you’ve come this far to become sacrifices for Luna’s group. You’re trying to get on the good side of the losing team. With your repeated concessions and compromising, you’re living like a loser… You won’t obtain anything like that. You’ll never become king.”

“…”

“Only those who sacrifice other people to obtain their goal will get their wish granted. Those are the people who will always come out on top.”

“So…people like you?”

“!” Mr. Kujou was the one to go silent this time.

“I don’t think that way… There is someone I think is befitting to be king. That ruler and her vassals aren’t necessarily always coming out on top. They’re getting spit in the face, wounded, but they had the strength to crawl back up every time they go down.”

Felicia was thinking of Luna, with her mysterious self-confidence and smile, and Rintarou, standing next to her, seeming exasperated.

“When I see them, I think…they’re breathtaking. They’re the ones I admire.”

“…”

“The type of king that wins by sacrificing something will give up after a single loss. But the king with their face in the mud will always make another comeback. The issue is whether they stand up again… I think I’d like to be a king who stands up, persistent, even from the mud.”

Felicia elegantly pointed her sword at Mr. Kujou.

“It’s go time! I’m Felicia! Felicia Ferald! I aim to become a righteous king, even after I’ve been smeared in mud!”

“Royal Road—Sword of Waving War Flags!”

Misha ran up a building, firing at random below her using her Excalibur shaped like an assault gun. Bullets peppered the feet of the raging Questing Beast.

But mana particles gathered near the bullets, forming an Aura…which began to take shape. When there was enough mana, something manifested in this world.

Knights.

Knights sitting astride war horses, equipped in full suits of armor.

Knights in formation and charging at the Questing Beast.

"Go! Surround the Questing Beast and keep attacking to hold it back!"

Several dozen knights had already appeared around the beast, attacking it from all directions. The monster flailed and stomped on the knights, mowing them down. Squished fighters turned into puffs of mana. They barely even managed to slow the beast down.

"Royal Road—Sword of Waving War Flags!" Misha fired off more bullets, summoning reinforcements for the side the beast had defeated.

Even though they outnumbered the monster, they couldn't even dull its movements.

"Cough?! Cough!" Suddenly, Misha started hacking up blood.

"…You're being reckless." Sir Palamedes leaped down to stand next to her. "Your Excalibur is strong—the strongest when it comes to suppressing others. But it's physically taxing to use. If you don't handle it right, you might shorten your lifespan. So you should only use it when you know you're going to win… Wasn't that the plan?"

"…Shut up."

"But you're giving it your all here, even though we don't know if we'll win… At this pace, you won't last long," Sir Palamedes said.

"But I'm upset…!" Misha gripped her gun and gritted her teeth. "She's calm and composed, even when facing King Arthur and the Questing Beast… She's even overcome the quest of the Holy Grail… I hate to admit that Luna has outclassed me…!"

"…Misha."

"I can't let it end like this… I just can't…! I feel like cursing my earlier self for being intimidated by a stronger opponent…! I want to become stronger…like Luna…!"

"…Of course." Sir Palamedes looked down at the raging Questing Beast. "Then…we'll have to hold this beast back, even if we can't win against it. To exact your revenge."

"Right! Please, Sir Palamedes! Lend me your strength!"

"All of it," he declared. Sir Palamedes leaped. "Now, I will fulfill my destiny from my past life! Let's do this, Questing Beast!"

High in the air, aiming for the top of the beast's head, Sir Palamedes slashed his sword.

They had finally started each of their final battles, fighting for their nonnegotiable demands, exchanging blows as passionately as ever.

No one could tell if one side was stronger than the other. A fierce match. A close one.

The terrified people of the town had gradually come out of their hiding spots to witness those battles, stealthily watching from their windows. There was a little glimmer of hope, even in this state of despair.

Meanwhile—

—

—Deep, deep at the bottom of the ocean.

It was darker than shadows down there. Not a single sound was produced in this motionless world. Not a single ray of light ever penetrated this place…

There stood a single boy.

"Ah… I guess it's nice that I beat you up, but…I have no clue how to get out of here," he murmured, shrugging to himself. "…Makes sense, I guess. I'm deep in Fomorian territory here… It's completely cut off from the material world… Guess there's no way for me to get home… Not that this is news…"

He didn't seem like he was in distress, even though his situation seemed despairing. He carefully cradled a hawthorn Celtic cross in his hand.

"…Somehow, I know she's fighting somewhere… I can feel her light—bright and straightforward like a true king… Though we're hopelessly far away, she's trying to show me—*tell* me—that, shining her light in the dark…"

No light was in the dark abyss, but he swore he could feel it. The cross in his hand guided him to its presence. He couldn't perceive anything around him. All five senses—and his consciousness itself—would melt into the dark depths if he let it.

The boy started to walk slowly.

"…She's waiting for me… I need to get back to her. I promised I would…"

…He marched through the dark, trudging forward.

"Yeah, I think it'll be okay. Her light is on the other side of this darkness… If I don't lose sight of it, I'll be able to get back. I'll get there… Just you wait… Luna…"

The boy walked for eternity…to get back to the side of the girl he was meant to be with.

He continued to walk—simply and earnestly.

CHAPTER 5

The True Excalibur

“You’re so annoying…! Just let yourself be swallowed up in the darkness already…!”

Morgan summoned a number of shadow hands. A shadow bog. A shadow tsunami. They coiled and corroded the world as if about to absorb everything.

“Gah! Lahat Chereb! Go!” Sir Kay’s Lahat Chereb burned away the torrent of darkness.

“There! Sink to the Ninth Circle of Grief—Cocytus!”

Nayuki’s fairy magic created a barrier of frost—the Ninth Circle of Arctic Hell. Morgan’s surroundings instantly lowered to absolute zero temperatures, forming a frozen hellscape. For a moment, they slowed her movements…

“Morgaaaaaaaaaan!”

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Leaping into the air, Sir Galahad crashed into Morgan, attacking fiercely with the Real Lance of Longinus in her right hand and David’s Sword in her left.

With hundreds of instant waves emitting from her sword and spear, she attempted to force Morgan out. Sir Galahad parried Morgan’s magic and spear using her Joseph of Arimathea’s Shield.

David’s Sword was a holy weapon that granted its wielder immortality and transcendental focus that made the world seem like it had stopped. The Real Lance of Longinus was a Holy Spear with blood at the tip that could heal any wound *and* a demon spear that would prevent any wound it created from being healed. As long as Joseph of Arimathea’s Shield was equipped, it boasted an invincible defense that could guard against anything.

Sir Galahad, the holiest saint, could handle these relics because she was who she was. She had skills that exceeded even the strongest knight, Sir Lancelot. Under normal circumstances, there was no way any person in this world could win against her.

“Hmm? Is that all you’ve got, Sir Galahad?” Morgan twirled her two spears at superspeed and smiled as she continued to deal with Sir Galahad’s blows. “Even a chosen saint is just a child of man! I suppose you can’t win against a god!”

“Gah?!”

And lo, Morgan’s ability at battle had outdone Sir Galahad’s. As it should. Morgan le Fay was Queen Morrigan, the strongest Celtic warrior

goddess, who had spent all her time—an eternity relative to a human life—in conflicts and war. Though Sir Galahad rivaled gods with her genius, she'd only lived for seventeen years, making her devastatingly underexperienced in terms of battle.

As one of the Three Goddesses of Fate, Morgan had the ability of foresight. Morgan had regained only a portion of her powers as Morrigan, but she weaponized her battle techniques and intuition to overpower Sir Galahad. Had the knight not possessed her relics, she would have been defeated instantly. Had they not had Lahat Chereb and the providence of the Holy Grail, Sir Kay and Nayuki would not have been able to do a single thing.

"That's enough… That's enough, Sir Galahad…!" Breath ragged, Sir Kay readied Lahat Chereb and stood beside Sir Galahad's shoulder. "Yeah… If Morgan could roam free, we would all be dead in an instant… Luna would be… By delaying Morgan, your life has meaning—as Luna's Jack…! There's meaning to us being here…!"

"I know. Even I'm not so conceited to think I could win against a goddess… I'm counting on you, Sir Kay and Nayuki," said Sir Galahad.

"It seems you understand nothing, Sir Galahad!" Morgan flew through the air and crossed her spears overhead. "We're both…trying to slow each other down!"

She swung down her spears charged with Aura. In that instant, the flaming chunk of a star plummeted from a distance in the sky, aimed directly at Sir Galahad's head.

"A *Meteor Swarm*?! The attack you've used to topple many battlefields in your favor…?!" Sir Galahad raised and readied the Real Lance of Longinus, immediately gathering Aura in her spear. "Get a good look at this! The roar of my spear—Longinus Sin!"

When she brought it down, red lightning whizzed at the star fragment that approached. A direct hit. The flaming meteor scattered into bits in the air, and its splinters turned into flames that showered the beautiful island.

"Ahhh?!"

"Gaaaaaaah!"

The windstorm from the violent impact tore through the place.

"Haaaaaah!"

The storm eddied. As the place was pelted with flaming rain, Luna sprinted forward, ever forward. She raced toward King Arthur.

"Yaaaaaaaaah!"

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! You're a stubborn one!"

Her sword crashed into King Arthur's. Each time she pulled back, she returned to press into his blade, and on they went. Again, and again, and again, Luna continued to battle King Arthur, like this simple movement was all she could do. King Arthur parried her, indifferently, sending her back without much care.

"…Do you understand now?"

“—Ngh?!”

King Arthur deflected her sword. “You can’t win against me,” he proclaimed loudly.

“Shut your mouth!” Luna put all her power into her swing, as if in response.

He blocked her instantly, kicking her back. Luna launched herself off the ground and twirled through the air with catlike agility, and then she sprinted toward him in a straight line to strike.

“We’re so different in strength, unfortunately.”

“Shut up!”

“Just so you know, I’m not even exerting myself.”

“Shut up!”

“I would prefer not to hurt one of my descendants… I wish you’d put yourself in my shoes…”

“Shut up!”

“Oh, that’s too bad… I didn’t think you’d make it this far in this impossible situation…”

“…Shut up…!”

“If you had just one more person—*just one person with you*—things might have been different…”

“Shut uuuuuuuuuuup!”

VWOOM! Luna’s sword sped in from the side. King Arthur leaped back to create distance from her.

“You’re a smart one. Haven’t you pieced it together? You must know you won’t be able to win. You must know the world will end.”

“…?!”

“Tell me, how many minutes is it until midnight? I imagine it must be soon.”

“I…won’t give up…!” Luna glared at King Arthur.

“*Siiigh…* Someone’s persistent… Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” King Arthur readied his sword—the true Excalibur—with a *shling*. “I could do nothing until time runs out…but that won’t be the same as defeating you, I guess.”

“What are you trying to say…?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Starting now, I’ll show you just how different we are as kings. I’ll show you…my Royal Road.”

“What?!” Luna unintentionally let her expression harden, steadying herself. “…Hmph! That’s useless! Everyone already knows about your Royal Road!” she barked. “Your Royal Road is the Slashing Sword… A single blow can slash through any object… It’s amazing, but that’s basically all it does!”

“…”

“That means all I have to do is dodge you! Even if our swordsmanship is as different as night and day, you’ll never get me with your trick if I know it’s coming…”

Luna thought this worked in her favor.

King Arthur's Slashing Sword and Luna's Sword of Camaraderie were similar—both were blades that manifested power… Their Royal Road would unleash a knockout blow and leave them vulnerable when it was cast.

I have to wait for my chance and counter him to reverse the outcome of this fight…!

Luna carried her sword low and measured the distance between them…

"…I knew you didn't really understand my Excalibur," King Arthur started to say.

"…In what way?"

"Didn't you think it was strange that my sword is called the Slashing Sword…?"

"What? You're being cryptic."

"Think about it, young one. What's the difference between my sword's name…and all of yours?"

"…?" Luna's mind raced, recalling all the inscriptions she'd seen until now.

She thought of the meanings of the inscriptions of the swords that described their Excaliburs.

Luna's Excalibur, the Steel Sword of *Camaraderie*.

Felicia's Excalibur, the Radiant Steel Sword of *Glory*.

Emma's Excalibur, the Steel Sword of Compassionate *Guidance*.

Kujou's Excalibur, the Military *Conquest* Steel Sword.

Mordred's Excalibur, the Sword of *Destruction*.

Then, King Arthur's sword, the *Slashing* Sword.

Something was different about his sword. Something strange. Something odd. But what in the world could it be…?

"…?! Don't tell me—?!" Luna felt goose bumps all over when she realized the truth.

"Seems like you pieced it together. My sword's inscription is incomplete, left without a noun."

That was the subtle difference between them. Something was missing from the name of his sword. And this difference was a fatal one…

"In life, I didn't think it was appropriate to wield this sword. In that way, you and I were cut from the same cloth. I thought we all needed to clear our own paths ourselves. That's why I never spoke this inscription out loud…so it would never have been passed down to you."

"…?!"

"I'll show you the sheer violence unleashed by a royal sword that can sever fate, by a blade gifted to a divinely selected King." King Arthur held his sword up…slowly.

"Sir Kay! Nayuki! Sir Galahaaad!" Luna yelled. "Ruuuun!"

"Huh?!" They couldn't do anything as they continued to battle with Morgan.

He was simply ruthless.

"Royal Road—Slashing Fate Sword!"

Just then, his sword discharged a blinding light, making them cover their eyes. Their vision was flooded with bright white.

In the next moment…

FWOOM! BWOOSH!

Luna, Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad's bodies were lacerated, spraying blood that spread like blooming flowers. The impact flung the four in different directions.

"Wha…?!"

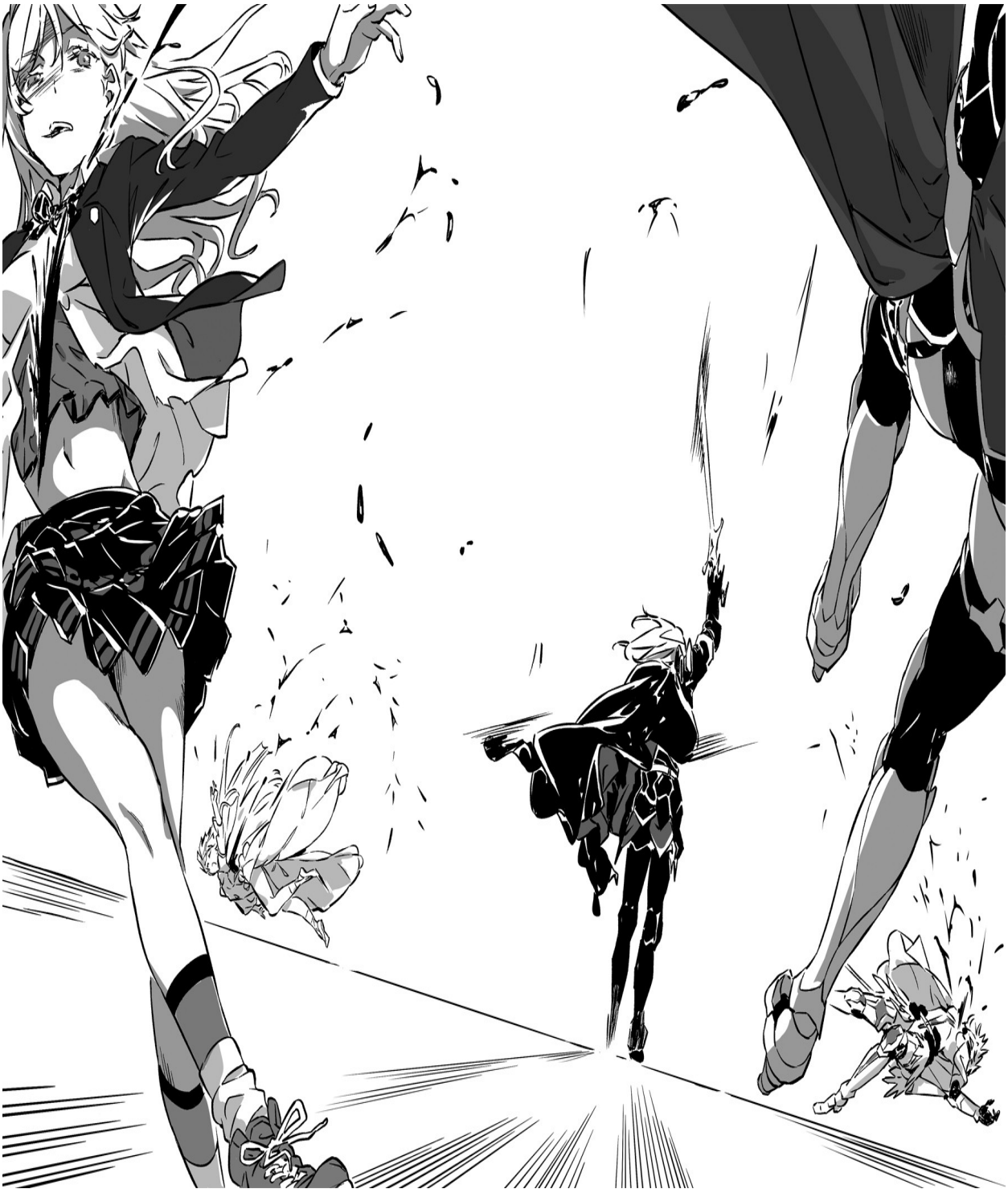
"Huh…?"

Their eyes widened in disbelief as they soared through the air. King Arthur kept his sword in the air above his head. He hadn't swung, far from Sir Kay's fight against Morgan. They had been out of his reach. He couldn't have sliced through them…and yet he managed to do that.

"You're joking…! H-how…? I can't be hurt…! I shouldn't be wounded…!" Sir Galahad looked at David's Sword and then at Joseph of Arimathea's Shield. She should have been immortal, invincible…but the holy relics had been smashed.

Sir Galahad collapsed facedown like a broken marionette, sustaining untreatable wounds.

King Arthur spoke to her. "…It matters not if you're immortal or invincible. It matters not if you're at a great distance. My Excalibur can tear through fate and all matters of things: distance, karma, destiny, any obstacle that obstructs my path."



“Th-that sword…! *Cough?!* You’re cheating…! Gah!” Luna hacked up blood, keeled over.

…He’d gotten her. The tendons in her right hand and left foot had been amputated. One lung had been punctured. Even if she wanted to cast a spell, the excruciating pain garbled her concentration, and she couldn’t say the incantation. She couldn’t fight, even if she wanted to.

It wasn’t a matter of willpower. It was physically impossible to move.

Blood pooled around Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad, too, slumped over and collapsed facedown.

“Did you finally decide to use that thing?” Morgan leaped down next to King Arthur. “I was getting annoyed by them…especially Sir Galahad with her relics. You helped me out there.”

“Ah-ha-ha. Sorry, sister…I was just having so much fun.”

As they exchanged casual conversation, King Arthur stared down at Luna, who looked unsightly at his feet.

“Do you get it now? Our kingliness is just so different… But it’s not your fault. I thought you were doing well. It’s just that I make a better king than you.”

“…?!” Luna gritted her teeth, using her sword as a cane and trying to stand up several times. Each time, she failed, clumsily crumpling to the ground…

“Don’t move around… Or you might die. After all, I went through the trouble to keep you alive… I need you to keep living.”

“…What…are…? *Cough!*”

“You heard me. I don’t want you to lose your life in vain. I’d like you to join me…on my Wild Hunt.”

“?!” Luna’s eyes snapped open.

“The Wild Hunt is made up of apparitions and heroes from all eras and places. And you worked hard, to be honest. You earned your place in my Wild Hunt as a hero.” King Arthur offered Luna a hand. “What do you say? Will you tear through the skies with me? Why don’t we prompt the Catastrophe and change this world together…?”

“As if…! *Cough!*” Luna was having trouble producing full sentences.

“Your eyes… Someone’s determined…” King Arthur shrugged and looked at Morgan. “I do wonder if she’ll change her mind if she sees that… Sister…”

“I got you.” Morgan smirked and stood in front of Luna.

As Luna crawled along the ground and looked up, Morgan raised her hand in front of the girl and whispered some sort of spell. Beyond her palm materialized a hazy window of light like a TV. It displayed something to her…

Lightning raced over the ground. It was Sir Balin, sprinting on the earth, smashing the daggers that came down on him like a meteor shower.

“—Uh?!” Sir Mordred’s eyes opened wide as she clutched her Sword of Destruction, releasing another set of daggers to stop Sir Balin.

“Hmph—!” Sir Balin deflected them with his sword, accelerating faster.

“—Huh?!”

ROAR! Sir Balin passed by Sir Mordred.

“—Gah?!” Sir Mordred was sent flying through the air, body sustaining lacerations, blood squirting.

“Sir Mordred?! Gah—” Sir Dinadan tried to rush in after her, forcing his horse to change course to charge Sir Balin.

FWOOM! Sir Balin vanished, appearing and disappearing for a moment behind Sir Dinadan, over the horse’s back.

“Aaaaaaah—?!” As his horse was dismembered, its sinews flying in all directions, Sir Dinadan found himself cut all over, thrown onto the ground.

“Guh, *cough*—how do you move so fast…?!” Sir Mordred struggled to get up.

“Looks like you underestimated the strongest knight of the early Round Table,” Sir Balin said. “My divine protection comes from the Fomorians… My speed is boosted, the longer a battle is drawn out… I’ve always been a slow starter.”

“…?!” Sir Mordred recalled how Sir Balin had accomplished all kinds of military feats in the legendary era, most toward the end of battles.“… *Cough*… So you’re a slow starter who speeds up to be the fastest? …Sounds like a load of crap to me…!” Sir Mordred laughed sarcastically, facing a real beast.

“Trying to fight my speed with numbers, huh,” Sir Balin observed. “You were right in strategizing this way, but this wasn’t nearly enough…”

“Gah…?!”

“Aren’t you in excruciating pain, being half alive? I’ll take you out of your misery…”

Sir Balin approached Sir Mordred, who couldn’t move a finger…one step, then another…

“Gah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Wonderful!” King Pellinore seemed genuinely delighted as he laughed loudly. “Look! Good job! Be proud, maiden! You’ve laid a scratch on me!” He raised his left hand, showing a tiny flesh wound—a fraction of an inch long—on the back.

“…Father… You’re a monster…! That’s all, after you fought Klingsor and Emma’s Slashing Sword…?!” Sir Percival groaned and collapsed on the ground.

“Hah…! Hah…! Hah…!” Emma stood in a daze, breathing raggedly.

It was obvious at a glance that Emma and Sir Percival were tragically beaten down.

…Is this it…?! Sir Percival groaned as if giving up the fight.

His legs had been done in by their last-ditch effort to fight King Pellinore. Moving was out of the question. Emma had already used her

Royal Road twice, leaving her with no moves… If she used it again and lost her sword…she would have no way to defend against the beast.

Any normal sword couldn't go against King Pellinore's blade. He would obliterate it. The only one that could face him was Excalibur, the highest classed sword in the world, even an imperfect one.

More importantly…Emma is already at her limit…!

Emma was riddled with wounds, at the verge of collapsing from exhaustion. She was standing on her own two feet…but that was all she could manage. She'd been using her swordsmanship and skills to barely deflect King Pellinore, who could pulverize her body with one clean hit. Already, she'd reached her limit—mentally and physically. In fact, she was barely conscious.

She limply let the sword hang down and lowered her face, letting her empty eyes roam the vacant air.

"You put up a good fight, little lass! I'll give you that!" King Pellinore's feet thumped as he approached Emma and stood in front of her.

"…" Emma was silent. She didn't react, even as he loomed nearer.

"As a reward, I'll send you to oblivion with my most tremendous blow!" King Pellinore raised his long sword above his head, a sublime Aura converging on its tip, warping the space around it from its force. "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Feast your eyes on this! That which broke King Arthur's Excalibur!"

The Aura amassed. Preparing to detonate its greatest firepower, the sword tip started to glow, power limitless. It grew into a larger sphere, lighting its surroundings like daytime. If she took that hit, nothing would be left but a gaping crater.

"…Miss Emma! R-run!" Sir Percival's warning echoed in vain…

"…" Emma maintained her silence, seeming barely conscious…

"…This is it…" Misha slumped to her knees onto the ground, tossing away her assault-gun-shaped Excalibur.

Hers shot out bullets made of her own mana. And she was out of ammo. She'd exhausted her magic.

"ROOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAR!"

Meanwhile, the Questing Beast was in excellent health. In fact, it was trying to ram into the immobile girl, charging toward her with its gigantic frame…

"…Do whatever you want…," Misha rasped. *"Cough, cough…"*

Just then, Sir Palamedes stood over her, tattered like Misha, staring down the monster.

"What do you think you're doing…?"

"Ha-ha-ha. My legs are done for… I can't carry you, so…" Somehow, he still seemed cheerful. "At the very least…I'd like to spend my final moments with you, my King…"

"Hmph. You're so stupid… What's up with you? I don't recall you being so pious."

“Don’t you know? I might be a knight with a bad personality, but I have a devoted side.”

“…If you say so. Then, stay with me until the end…”

“Yes, got it…my Kin—”

The rest of his words were drowned out by the earth-shattering footsteps and roar of the Questing Beast, plunging at them with its great body.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Oh, you look so pitiful, Felicia Ferald!” Kujou’s laughter echoed all over the place.

“…”

An ocean of blood spread below his feet… And at its center, Felicia was collapsed facedown like a puppet with cut strings. Not even the slightest of movements was feasible for her in this state. Her Radiant Steel Sword of Glory pierced the ground next to her like a grave marker and had long ago lost its luster.

“Gah…?!”

“It’s over.” Sir Lancelot drilled his sword deep into Sir Gawain’s chest.

Sir Gawain hacked up blood, his body convulsing. They were close enough to feel each other’s breaths.

Sir Lancelot looked at him and seemed somewhat torn. “It seems that… I’ve won again.”

“…”

“But you were…the strongest you’ve ever been.”

Slump. Sir Gawain’s eyes rolled to the back of his head, which hung low. He leaned onto Sir Lancelot as he collapsed…

Luna was seeing her friends’ final moments through this portal of light.

“Oh…ohh…g-guys…”

“Ha-ha-ha. Thoughts? What crossed your mind, seeing the last moments of all who made it here, fueled by their faith in you?” Morgan snickered in delight as she whispered in Luna’s ear.

Crack. Jaw slack, Luna stared as a crack formed in the base of her Excalibur.

“…Looks like you’ve given up.”

That was when the view of Avalon curled up like smoke. They were back in the throne room.

Morgan stood next to King Arthur… And Luna, Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad were folded down disgracefully in front of them, wounded all over, left without a fight.

Upon seeing that, King Arthur swung his Excalibur…and all four walls blew out.

VWOOSH.

In an instant, he had exposed the place to the wind. The night sky was visible overhead.

“Perfect timing…it seems.”

GOOONG…rang a bell from somewhere. GOOONG…GOOONG… GOOONG…

Its corrosive sound flooding their minds, the sinister chime seemed to herald the end of the world.

“It’s a new day. The Wild Hunt will start here. The Catastrophe will begin and bring the world to its end,” King Arthur announced.

At which point, darkness spread. The sky was dotted black.

If they strained their eyes, they would have figured out what those were: apparitions, the size of small grains that vastly outnumbered the stars.

The horde descended upon the city as if to blanket it.

GOOONG…

“Mmmmgh?! Is it about to begin?!” King Pellinore suddenly halted his sword and looked up into the sky, hearing the bell of destruction.

GOOONG…

“Finally… It’s time for my lord to rightfully rule the world…” Sir Balin stopped in his tracks and gazed up.

GOOONG…

“Heh… With this, Kotone is saved… This was what I wanted… I have no regrets…,”grumbled Mr. Kujou, listening to the chime.

GOOONG…GOOONG…GOOONG…

The toll of the bell boomed through the city.

All who waited with bated breath felt their stomachs drop… And all they could do was quiver in fear.

“No one can stop my Wild Hunt.” King Arthur proclaimed the grim truth.

They had nothing to say to object.

“I saved this front-row seat for you, Luna. Watch us fly through the sky. Burn that image in your eyes,” King Arthur told her—in a way that was graceful, sonorous, affectionate.

“Aaaah… Aaah…” Morgan seemed emotional as she clasped her hands together and turned toward the sky. “It’s finally here…!”

In this moment, she didn’t seem like a frightful witch. She almost looked like a maiden dreaming of love.

“Finally,” she chirped, “I’ll be able to see him… Accolon…! It’s been so long… Too long, in fact…!”

GOOONG…GOOONG…GOOONG…

…Is it over? Luna asked herself, slipping into dejection.

…Is this really how we go? Is the world ending?

She didn’t even need to ask herself. It was over.

Her team had been the final hope for salvation, however microcosmic. With their defeat, there was no saving anything anymore.

The Wild Hunt was going to break out…and its effects would be irreversible.

Like in the myths, the earth would become the ground of gods, fiends, and apparitions, who would rule over the world to bring about the Dark Ages.

Humans would prostrate themselves before them, worshipping them, fearing them, and being held under their control as servants. And it was unpreventable.

It was over now.

Luna's path to become king…ended here.

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"Luna Artur… Just who are you?" King Arthur suddenly murmured. "I can't believe you can still look at me like that…after everything you've been through."

"…Huh?!" Morgan whipped around, yanked from her daydream that victory was theirs.

"What a joke…! *Cough!* As if I'd ever give up…! Especially when the world's about to end…!" Luna stood, coughing blood. "Stop saying it's over… *Cough!* I'm still alive…! This match…hasn't been settled yet…!"

"…Why?" Even King Arthur hardened his expression. Gone was his confidence. He couldn't help himself. "You're such a sore loser. Your sword is broken. Your friends are dead. I can't see how you'd ever win. It's not shameful to kneel and despair in this situation. If I were in your position, I would…take a knee in defeat."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha…!" Luna chuckled in a sinister way. "*Cough!* I—I got you to admit it…! You just confirmed it yourself…which of us is better fit to be king…! I win…!"

"Huh?!" King Arthur's expression turned furious.

For a moment, the room felt like it was below freezing. But his cold rage lasted only a second.

King Arthur immediately returned to showing a placid expression. "I just don't understand… Why do you keep fighting?"

"That's obvious…! Because Rintarou is watching!"

"…?" King Arthur tilted his head to the side, visibly confused.

Hand trembling, Luna held up the hawthorn Celtic cross around her neck, seeming confident. "I know Rintarou is seeing if I'm fit to be a king… Even at this moment, he's watching from somewhere in this world…! It's not some theory… I know this for a fact!"

"…"

"I'm going to become the world's best king and make him my vassal…! So I can't make myself look bad… Just because the world is ending, I can't do something unbefitting of a king!"

Her scream was absorbed by the night sky. After some silence…

"I don't really understand, but I've realized I can't make you surrender," he replied, as if coming to terms with something. "You're right. You might

be more capable of being a king… But that’s too bad… The world is still ending, regardless.”

King Arthur raised his sword over his head—the strongest blade, the Slashing Fate Sword.

“And if you won’t admit your defeat…there’s no other way for me to end this fight…”

He gathered Aura into the Slashing Fate Sword, which shone like daylight.

He was preparing to use his final Royal Road.

“Good-bye, Luna Artur, the true king I met in the distant future.”

The surging light seemed almost as if it was ready to break like a dam…

“Aaaaaarthuuuuuur!” Luna squeezed out the last of her strength and started running.

For the first two or three steps, she staggered slightly before gaining momentum, hurtling forward with her battered body. At the critical moment, she ran at an impossible speed, carrying her cracked Excalibur and running straight at King Arthur.

Just ten yards between Luna and King Arthur. It seemed to stretch forever.

“Royal Road—”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“—Slashing Fate Sword!”

Without mercy, he carried out the final declaration, and the world was swallowed up by the light of the strongest king’s sword and burned white.

—

Dammit, Luna cursed, swallowed by the whiteness. Hey, Rintarou? Did I make a good king? What did you think?

Luna thought, Ah-ha-ha. No good, huh… You wouldn’t think I put up a good fight. I needed to win… Right…?

But you know… I have one regret. Can you guess what it is?

……

……

If you were with me right now, Rintarou… I think… No… I know we’d win.

Not because I’m a sore loser. Not because I’m codependent… But if you were here, I would have won.

I mean, kings shouldn’t fight alone. Shouldn’t they have vassals to support them?

I can trust Sir Kay, Nayuki, Felicia, Sir Gawain, Emma, and Sir Galahad… But…

But…without you…I…

…Do you hear me? Rintarou…

Then…

“Don’t worry,” someone assured, a familiar voice flooding Luna’s ears. “…Didn’t I tell you? I’m already the world’s best vassal for the world’s greatest king.”

“…What?”

“That’s why I’ll always return to you. As many times as it takes.”

Luna opened her eyes. Darkness was the first thing she saw—an abyss that deflected the sinister light that damaged everything, a dimness that opened up, splitting the night sky.

Darkness personified carried Luna, holding onto her side.

But this darkness—darker than the bottom of the sea—was gentle, all embracing.

And its identity was—

“Rintarou…?” Luna murmured in disbelief, under the fissure of emptiness that closed everything up.

“Yeah, it’s me. Sorry I’m late.”

Unruffled, the boy in darkness answered in his mischievous way.

Rintarou Magami.

Rintarou Magami in his Fomorian Transformation.

CHAPTER 6

One Choice

Misha was sure she had died. With Sir Palamedes, she had been trampled by the Questing Beast, blown up into pieces.

That's what she'd believed from the bottom of her heart.

"ROAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!"

Her head snapped up when she heard the monster fighting death, and she saw the Questing Beast howling in agony, thrashing. Its enormous form gouged the ground, and the monster thrashed into nearby buildings that collapsed under its weight. It looked as if a storm had ravaged the scene… The Questing Beast—invincible, it seemed—was weakening, slowly but surely. Black mist was being released from its body, its existence fading.

The Questing Beast was meeting its end.

"What…happened? What's going on?"

"I'm not sure…but the Questing Beast is dying. That's the only thing I know."

"But…why…?" Misha was in a daze, unbelieving. "But the Questing Beast is death and ruin incarnate. How could it die…? That should be impossible…"

"Yeah. A human can never win against a concept incarnate. That's the truth," Sir Palamedes explained. "But…what if there was someone beyond human? Like someone who came from the side that created these concepts?"

"An entity who creates death and destruction…? Well, they'd have to be a god or a demon lord or something…"

The Questing Beast collapsed, the ground quaking on impact, and stopped moving, like it couldn't continue any longer. Something strange was sticking out of its forehead.

Two blades caught the eye, even in the dark.

A red and white pair of swords. Familiar weapons.

"Th-those are…?!" Misha was stunned.

As if struggling for a final time or searching for a place to die, the Questing Beast started to trudge off somewhere in front of her eyes, staggering with each step…

—

"…Ah… Aaaah…"

"…Merlin…?"

"Th-this can't be real…"

No one managed to say much of anything when Rintarou suddenly appeared.

Rintarou was the only one who talked in a joking manner. “Man, Balor really tried to drag me deep into Fomorian territory as his last attack. I had a hell of a time trying to get back.”

“…”

“I could see how it would spell the end for anything, but I never lost hope… After all…” Rintarou held the hawthorn Celtic cross and showed it to Luna. “In that never-ending darkness, I saw your light, like a king guiding the way for me… I knew I’d be able to get back if I followed it.”

“…”

“So… It’s all because of you. Because you’re a sore loser until the very, very, very end, I could get back to the real world without losing sight of the path—”

As she was being held from the side in Rintarou’s arms, Luna felt her right knee swing up…

GWOOSH! …She kicked Rintarou right in the forehead.

“Yoooow?!” he screamed, unable to bear it. “You! Idiot! What do you think you’re doing?!” Rintarou protested, teary-eyed.

“*You’re* the idiot…! You were so late…!” Luna smiled, happy tears streaming down her face. “Aren’t you my vassal…?! Then you should be racing over to me faster…! You’re so stupid…! It’s capital punishment for you…!”

“…Yeah, sorry.” He stopped resisting immediately. “Well…” Rintarou faced King Arthur again, still holding Luna.

King Arthur looked straight at him with a somewhat complicated expression. “I suppose this isn’t going to be an emotional reunion for either of us…”

“Seems that way…”

Merlin and King Arthur… It was a strange atmosphere.

“…I can’t believe you’ve come… Merlin… Rintarou Magami…!” Morgan wedged herself between the two. “How vexatious…! You escaped fate to appear at the eleventh hour… Just who are you…?! You’re supposed to be on our side… You’re only with Luna Artur because of our little trick of fate…! So why aren’t you with us at the end of the world?! Why are you still with Luna?!”

“The hell if I know, cretin. I’m an ally for womankind…especially cute girls. Why should I go along with *your* plan, you detestable hag?”

“Grr!” Morgan was only exasperated for a moment. She immediately recovered her composure. “Most of it has already been settled… It doesn’t matter if you’re back at this point.”

“Oh?”

“Your friends have already been defeated by our underlings. Your return doesn’t change the fact that we’re stronger than you all. Do you understand?”

Rintarou’s eyes went wide.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

He burst out in a fit of laughter.

“Wh-what’s so funny?!”

“Do you even hear yourself?!” He keeled over before fixing a tiny smile on her. “I saw them fighting. But you know what…? My friends would never lose to your lackeys!”

“…Excuse me?” Morgan was stunned.

“Other than the Russian. Her enemy would be hard to fight as a human, so I lent her a helping hand, but…my friends are more than capable of handling their opponents. I can’t imagine why they’d lose. They don’t need my help.”

“Wh-wh-what are you saying…?!”

“How about you get your eyes checked? Take a good look.”

From the windswept throne room, Rintarou looked down at Avalonia, which was sinking into darkness.

“I’m pretty sure they’re going to settle things soon.”

—

“…I-is that…?!” Sir Balin stood still in astonishment.

“The fight could change course when you were distracted by the bell marking the beginning of the Wild Hunt…” Sir Mordred was on her knees, daringly holding a dagger in her hand. She scowled. “Those seconds when I was unconscious…spelled your defeat!”

“—Huh?!” Sir Balin looked up above his head, aggravated.

Daggers crowded the sky.

The situation didn’t appear any different from before. Sir Balin would have continued to use his lightning-quick swordsmanship to smack them down. He was floored, however, because something was strange about them. There were nearly infinite blades above him, these points turned on Sir Balin.

“Impossible… Your sword can’t summon that many daggers at once…!”

“Looks like you’ve fundamentally misunderstood my Sword of Destruction… I’m in control of my daggers until they touch my opponent. In other words, they never disappeared in the first place…!”

“…?!”

“These are the daggers that you’ve deflected until now…!” Sir Mordred swiped the blood from her mouth. “I know you’re confident in your speed and attacks, but…how’s this for you?! There’s no space for you to dodge, since they’re packed so densely… Can you get away?! Can you strike them down this time?!”

This was the final tactic imagined by Sir Dinadan, who was collapsed by Sir Mordred… She trusted his plan, continuing to bear through for this moment. That was why they had devoted their time to defending themselves for all this time.

Even though Sir Balin had smashed some daggers with his sword, those were the minority. Sir Mordred had been waiting patiently to collect enough daggers in the sky during their fight.

"…Cowards…! You tricked me…!"

"You're calling me a coward? You call this a trick? Hah… Have you been living under a rock? Who do you think you're talking to?" Sir Mordred replied. "I have something I have to do, even if people assume me of being cowardly or sly! …That's the only thing that hasn't changed from the distant past!"

"Erk…"

"This wouldn't have worked if you could use magic…but I confirmed something through our fight…! You have no magic! You're just a jock! You'll rely on your lightning speed that you honed for most of your life—and that's it!"

Gshk. Sir Balin ground his teeth and readied his two swords. "Fine, I'll dispose of them…! Fear the power of my lightning speed!"

"Let's go, Sir Balin! Royal Road—Sword of Destruction!"

The wall of swords closed in on Sir Balin from all sides, blotting him out.

"Oops! I shouldn't be looking away during a fight!" King Pellinore dropped his gaze, turning away from the bell of destruction.

"…" With empty eyes, Emma seemed almost unconscious, limply dangling her sword in both hands, lowering her head and stooping forward. She didn't reply to King Pellinore in any way.

"Hmph…! How pathetic…! You had a chance to attack me just then…!" King Pellinore fixed his large sword's aim on her once again. From his sword spilled a sublime Aura.

"Miss Emma! You must run…! Dammit! It's no use… Can't you hear me…?!" Sir Percival's voice didn't reach her, either.

"…" Emma remained silent. It seemed all life had been sapped from her. She didn't so much as quiver. It seemed she had already used up her strength long ago.

"Though it pains me, I'll give you one last gift as a warrior: a final blow dealt by my own sword! I'll send you over to the next world!" King Pellinore placed the last of his strength into his sword. "Diiiiieee!" He brought it down over Emma's head.

His ridiculously strong attack might have been enough to break the earth right in half, and it hummed as it approached to smash her to nothing.

"…I was waiting for you to show me your strength…!" The light suddenly returned to Emma's eyes as she flung her lowered sword up abruptly.

"You were conscious?! That's absurd!"

Of course, her swing—which she used all her weight to strike up—didn't stop King Pellinore's sword. He bore it down, trying to crush her to death, but…as they made contact, she parried it with a flick of her wrist, redirecting his power by using her right leg as an axis.

She didn’t seem to put up any resistance to King Pellinore’s sword and its meteoric fall as she rotated like a top. It was an unforgiving feat that wouldn’t have allowed for a split second’s delay…not a fraction of a second, a millisecond, a nanosecond, a moment.

She’d cultivated her swordplay for most of her life…which let her fight with the featherlike blade that King Pellinore mocked her for. It was a miracle that she’d accomplished this at the eleventh hour.

“No! Not a counterattack charged with all my poooower?!”

“Even my delicate sword…has a will!” Emma went right into it. “Royal Road—”

She weaponized King Pellinore’s sublime power…

“—Slashing Excalibuuuuuuuuuuuuuuur!”

She put all the power of the borrowed Excalibur into one last attack that she unleashed on King Pellinore, ripping into him diagonally.

“Hah…?!”

Suddenly, Mr. Kujou was coughing up blood.

“I-impossible…?! Wh-what’s happening…?!” He staggered backward one step, then another.

Felicia stood up, unsteady on her feet, from her own pool of blood and supported herself with her sword. “…I had one hypothesis…”

“A hypothesis…?!”

“Yes, I had a theory about your blade…the Military Conquest Steel Sword… It always makes you stronger than your opponent and creates a fixed power difference between us… That means…the weaker your opponent becomes…the weaker the sword will make you…right?”

“…?!” Mr. Kujou turned around to look behind him out of astonishment. Something was sticking out of his back. Felicia’s Messenger Pixie.

The tiny fairy had driven a dagger into Mr. Kujou’s back.

It wasn’t a fatal wound…but it certainly wasn’t an optimal place to sustain an injury.

“Impossible…! That’s the lowest class of fairies…?! H-how could it wound someone like me?! *Cough?!*”

“…It was a gamble, but…I was right…!”

“No…!” Mr. Kujou glared at Felicia. “Don’t tell me you were *waiting* for this moment?! Don’t tell me you let yourself get weaker and wait until my power would be inferior to some stupid fairy…?!”

“Heh. Ha-ha-ha… Sorry for using such a sly method, Mr. Kujou.” She seemed to be strangely sophisticated, though she looked far from graceful. “You let down your guard because you thought I was less than you…! If you wanted to defeat me…you could have…!”

Mr. Kujou had relied too much on his Excalibur. When he had his Military Conquest Steel Sword activated in a one-on-one fight, it basically meant that his opponent would never win against him. His mistake had been keeping it activated during their entire fight to make them feel like it was impossible to win.

What he should have done was kept his guard up, limited his sword's power, and finished her off.

"Dammit… Sh-shrew…!" Mr. Kujou raised his Excalibur in his shaking hands…

"I won't let youuuuu!"

VWOOM! Felicia threw her own sword that she had been using in place of a cane, which took his blade out of his hands.

"What—?!"

"Haaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Felicia used the last of her strength to vault off the ground and charge at Mr. Kujou. With a hand balled into a fist, she punched him square in the face.

"Gah—?!"

"I imagine you've never had a close fight before, huh?! But this is what fighting always looks like to me!"

Mr. Kujou bent backward, unable to withstand the blow. As he staggered, he was punched by Felicia again.

"I never lose when it comes to playing dirty!"

"…I've finally caught you, Sir Lancelot…"

"…You…!"

As Sir Lancelot's sword punctured Sir Gawain's chest, Sir Gawain grabbed his foe's arm that was gripping the blade.

"Nghh?!" Sir Lancelot tried to yank his sword out of Sir Gawain, but…he failed. "Gah… Why won't you die…?! That should have been fatal…!"

"I can only outdo you in natural-born toughness…"

Pinned by brawn like an ogre's, Sir Lancelot couldn't budge his sword. Sir Gawain hacked up blood as he kept a hold on Sir Lancelot's arm.

Aiming for the restrained knight…Sir Gawain raised the sword in his right hand.

"…" When Sir Lancelot realized what was happening, he stopped resisting. "…Of course it'd end like this."

"…? What makes you say that? What do you mean?" Sir Gawain tilted his head. "I hate to say this…but you've always had the upper hand. In swordsmanship and speed, you excel me… If you hadn't been so impatient to take my life…you would have won. Like in our three-day battle."

"Hah," Sir Lancelot spat. "You don't understand. Didn't I tell you that things are different now…?"

"Different in what way…?"

"I wouldn't last three days against you, now that you've found your real strength as a knight…and seeing as how I'm so pathetic…"

"…"

"…"

For a while, the two of them stared at each other.

"Heh… Ha-ha-ha… Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha…"

"Ha-ha-ha…"

They chuckled together for the briefest of moments.

“Hey, Sir Lancelot… I’ve always wanted to apologize to you about something…”

“…Words aren’t necessary, Sir Gawain. We’ve been through hell and back… And that’s why we parted ways… But I suppose that’s all in the past…”

“…You’re right.”

“I did not care as long as I served as the king’s sword. I thought I didn’t need anything if I could work for the sake of my king… That’s what I thought, at least…”

“That’s right… I was the same way… That’s normal for a knight…”

“But weak hearts have trouble sticking to things, it seems…”

“…I think so, too.”

They remembered the legendary era, back when they were so immersed in all there was to experience. Everything was so emotional back then: more fury, more sadness, more joy, more pain, more love, more tears. They could never return to their adolescent days, which they thought back to nostalgically and fondly.

“Good match.”

“…I suppose the next time we meet…”

“We’ll cross swords again. I won’t lose next time.”

“Ditto.”

Everything that needed to be said was communicated through their tense smiles.

Sir Gawain’s raised sword came crashing down. Sir Lancelot looked peaceful, almost as if he was relieved.

“B-but…that’s impossible…?!” Morgan stared at the image projected before her eyes.

She watched with round eyes as Sir Balin, King Pellinore, and Sir Lancelot became puffs of mana.

“…See?” Rintarou was the only one who looked like he understood what was going on. He seemed smug, like he knew this would happen.

“Grr…”

“Let’s see… All that’s left is defeating the evil leader and his flunky.” Rintarou put on a ferocious smile, heading toward King Arthur and Morgan.

Morgan was beginning to panic. This was all so unexpected.

King Arthur stepped in front of her, barely looking at her, not even from the corners of his eyes.

“Merlin…”

“Arthur…”

King Arthur and Rintarou faced each other straight on.

“It’s been a long time… I’ve wanted to see you…”

“…Yeah, me too.”

Merlin and Arthur.

Their encounter was where the legend started. And their separation had ended the tale. Their story had been bolstered by knights of the era and

their motivations, but at the core of the legend were Merlin and Arthur, and it always would be that way.

“Fate can be so strange… To think we’d reunite under these circumstances,” Arthur said.

“I agree.”

“You know… I couldn’t have cared less about kingly glory or world peace or the loyalty of my knights… All I wanted was to be with you… That’s what made me happy…”

“Me too. I had the time of my life… Gone was boredom when I was with you…”

They spoke as they reminisced on the distant past, thinking of memories of a prior life…

“Hey, Merlin? I want to walk down the same path as you again. I want you to follow me. What do you say?” King Arthur asked, almost appealing to him.

“…” Rintarou remained silent.

King Arthur considered Rintarou’s silence and saw the way he held Luna. Eventually, he smiled, coming to terms with something and looking a little forlorn.

“I see… So you found someone you want to serve more than me…”

“Yeah, that’s right. Sorry for cheating on you.” Rintarou lowered his eyes, seeming a bit sad. “I hate looking at you like this. More than that…I want to go down a path with her. I want to watch over her becoming king.”

“Ah-ha-ha. I can’t believe I’m hearing that from Merlin—corrupt as you are… You must be so blessed, Luna Artur. That’s nice… I’m jealous.”

He seemed like he meant those words. King Arthur flashed a smile.

“How about we start this thing?”

“Yeah.”

King Arthur readied his sword. Rintarou gently put down Luna.

“… Hit him with all you got, Luna.”

“Rintarou.”

“Hit him with everything that’s in you. I’ll clear the path… Think you can do it?”

“…?!” Luna’s face broke into a bold smile. She stood on her own two feet. “Of course! Who do you think you’re talking to?!”

She seemed so energetic and brave, no one could guess she was in excruciating pain.

“You’re a crafty one, Merlin! But I won’t let you obstruct the Wild Hunt! As if I would let you overturn this Grand Guignol that I’ve planned for eons!” Morgan held up her two spears, enraged.

“Heh! I demand a new stage director! I can’t even watch it, the writing is so bad!” Rintarou instantly summoned his red and white swords to his hands.

“…I’m going to win! I’ll win! Since I’m the true king!” Luna equipped herself with her broken sword.

It wasn’t clear if someone timed this.

Rintarou, Luna, King Arthur, Morgan…all moved at the same time.

“Hraaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Luna swung her sword up and charged.

But King Arthur moved even faster than she did. “Royal Road—Slashing Fate Sword!”

His sword started to burn bright, but…in the shadows of his illuminated blade…appeared another Rintarou, who stabbed at King Arthur from behind.

It was Rintarou’s dark magic, *Shadow Burrow*, which allowed him to instantly teleport anywhere.

SHIING! Rintarou’s two swords and King Arthur’s Excalibur collided as the king turned to face him.

“I always fight the same way.”

“… Merlin…?!”

“Who cares if someone has an invincible power? I just have to stop it before it’s activated! It’s not impossible—when you’re me!”

“Meeeeeerliiiiiiiiin!” Morgan slashed at Rintarou from behind.

Rintarou leaped away from King Arthur and turned again toward Morgan.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Luna swung at the king, taking Rintarou’s place.

SHIIIIIIIING!

Luna’s strength was on another dimension, compared to their previous battles. It might have been stronger than at the start of this fight.

King Arthur stumbled. “Gah…! Where did this power come from…?!”

“Isn’t it obvious? From the return of my best vassal! Wouldn’t any king be ecstatic about that?!”

King Arthur leaped backward, unable to handle it, but Luna hounded him, using her momentum to strike a second time, then a third.

“There’s no way—?!” Morgan was the one panicking, gritting her teeth as she exchanged blows with Rintarou using her spears. “Is Luna pushing back on Arthur…?! Gah!”

Morgan managed to contain her distress and deal with the opponent in front of her. She spun her pair of spears like a whirlwind to knock down Rintarou’s storm of attacks.

Shing, shing, shing. With each collision came an immense shock wave.

“This isn’t a problem… Not at all…!”

“Yeah? How’s this *not* a problem?!” Rintarou deflected her successive lunges as he jeered at her. “Your treachery ends here! I think you’re dealing with plenty of problems!”

“Hmph! How silly! You don’t even realize you’re seeing only the surface!” Morgan released eddying flames from her spears.

Rintarou discharged black flames from the sword he swept to the side and offset her fire.

“I’ll finish you off and help King Arthur deal with Luna…,” Morgan shouted. “Then everything will be happily ever after!”

“Yeah? You think you can beat me? Some sick joke! I dare you to try!”

“Obviously! I’m one of the Three Goddesses of Fate…! It’s not hard to defeat you, since I can see the near future—,” she gloated, parring his reckless swings.

Morgan took a peek at the future to see what he would do next.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!”

Morgan saw the future…when she’d be killed by his sword, 148 blows later.

“Eek?!” Morgan involuntarily squeaked and shrank away.

Rintarou instantly approached. She barely evaded a flash of his sword from the side. Face pale, Morgan was on the receiving end of the onslaught.

“Seems you saw a rosy future for yourself, huh?!”

“Why…? How?!” Was it the fault of her fighting style or stance? Morgan changed tactics, looking into the future over and over, trying to get a read on his next moves to get the jump on him.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!”

“Eeeeeek?!”

…Every possible future converged into a moment in time when she was killed by Rintarou.

“It can’t be! Lies…! Why would that happen…?!” Morgan had officially lost her cool, half frantic in handling Rintarou’s attacks. It seemed like he might overwhelm her at any moment.

Morgan found no sign that the future would change.

“No! No! No…!” They were cruelly approaching the number of blows that would fulfill the prophecy. “Why?! Why?!”

“It’s simple! I’m too strong for you to go up against me! That’s why!”

“But…! Is this Merlin…Balor’s bastard child…!”

That couldn’t be the whole story. It simply couldn’t be. The power that started to awaken in Merlin was stronger than in Balor.

What was its source…? How and why had the wheels of fate changed?

Morgan didn’t have time to mull it over. Not now.

Her movements were restricted to deflecting the swipes that came near her eyes and nose. Her spear swung in desperation… But there was nothing more left to do…

“No…! No…! I was so close…! I was *this* close to seeing him! This… This…isn’t what I wanted…!”

“Sorry.”

SHIIIIIING!

Rintarou flung his swords up on both sides, sending her spears flying from her hands.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!”

It was her final plea for help. His swords crossed as they sliced through her.

At the same time…

KLIIIING!

Metal scraped against metal—its sound almost violently clean.

“…!” At the center was Luna, following through her swing…

“Ah…” King Arthur was holding his sword in a stupor in front of her.

His sword…was broken at its base. His eyes widened for a moment, but he seemed to accept his fate, closing his eyes and assuming a peaceful expression.

“I’ve—” Luna took a firm step closer, rotating her sword up. *“—WOOOONNN!”*

The blade whooshed down. Her almighty blow was going to bear into the defenseless King and send him flying back.

—The match had been settled.

CHAPTER 7

The Last Showdown

In a certain alleyway…

"*Wheeze…Wheeze…* I didn't think you'd come here…" Mr. Kujou leaned his back against a wall. He slumped and sat down. "…Ha-ha, I can't even move a finger anymore…"

"Game over…it seems." Felicia picked up her fallen Excalibur and stood in front of him. She aimed the tip at his forehead.

His own Excalibur had fallen a slight distance from him, broken right in two, crumbling in chunks.

In other words…Mr. Kujou had acknowledged his defeat. He'd lost his qualification to be a King.

"…I don't understand." Felicia glanced at his Excalibur and knit her eyebrows. "Didn't you tell me there's someone you want to save?"

"…"

"Are you really going to acknowledge defeat, just because some mediocre girl has outwitted you? I don't get it. What are you scheming…?"

"You've trust issues, Felicia." Mr. Kujou chuckled. "Didn't I tell you? I was never interested in being a king."

"…"

"Heh-heh-heh. As long as I can save her, I didn't care about anything else… I've achieved my goal… There's no reason for me to fight anymore…"

"You achieved your goal…? What's that…?"

"I imagine this world—this island, at least—will undergo irreversible changes… Now she'll be able to live a long life in this transformed world, even though she was fated to die in the old world… In other words, my fight is over…"

"…"

It didn't seem like he was lying.

"Well… I guess all that's left is taking out the trash." Mr. Kujou looked straight up at Felicia. "Kill me, Felicia Ferald."

"?!" Felicia was speechless. "Wh-what are you're saying?! The fight is already—"

"I thought I just told you. My fight is over. I served my purpose… There's no reason for me to live anymore. All I have left is to be cleaned out…like trash. I originally planned to do that once everything had settled anyway…"

"St-stop that!" Felicia blustered, indignant. "Out of all the things that could come out of your mouth! Do you even hear yourself?!"

Sure, they had been fighting each other. One of them might have killed the other during the fight, but once the battle was over, it felt wrong to keep attacking. It was against the unspoken rules.

It mattered not what others would choose to do. It was irrelevant to her. Felicia was a proud king, set on that belief.

“Ha-ha-ha. You think I have the right to live? To fulfill my goal… To save her, I’ve taken a sinner’s path—killing innocent people, left and right. No one has dealt me my judgment, but…I deserve more than the death penalty. Now that I’ve gotten my goal, this scum shouldn’t exist in the world.”

“B-but…?!”

“I’ll never be forgiven for my crimes. I must disappear… I need to disappear from her presence. If she has a wicked sinner near her…I’m sure misfortune will find her… This is all for her sake.”

Mr. Kujou placed the tip of a dagger he had come to hold directly over his heart.

He didn’t hesitate as he tried to push the dagger in.

Bwoosh! Felicia instantly stepped forward, holding back his hand.

“… Felicia?” Mr. Kujou scowled, surprised.

“You lost your sword and your qualification as a king… The battle is over…but I won’t let this end in a way that’ll leave a bitter taste in my mouth.” Felicia looked straight at him. “So you might be an unforgivable sinner! But what will happen to the person you wanted to save? What will she do once you’ve left her alone in the world?!”

“…”

“You were willing to sully your hands to save her… I don’t know if she’s your lover or family…but do you really think she won’t grieve over you?!”

“Call me narcissistic…but I think she’ll be devastated. It’s in her nature to be kind. She’s always been too good for me…”

“In that case!” Felicia grabbed Mr. Kujou by the collar. “I’m not letting you choose death! No one can hand down judgment for your sins in this world, and you’ll never be forgiven for your crimes! So you should find a way to atone or something…”

Felicia was indignant as she blasted Mr. Kujou…when something happened.

GWOOSH!

Suddenly, a corner of that alleyway crashed down. What emerged from the space while obliterating the surrounding buildings was…

“The Questing Beast?!”

For some reason, black smoke curled off its body. It had weakened considerably. Even someone with untrained eyes could see that. This Questing Beast was on its way to death.

But instead of letting out a last breath, the monster seemed to be writhing around with its huge body…and crashed into a building near Felicia and Mr. Kujou, before falling silent. The building split in two… The top part started to lean toward them…

“…Gah?! Oh no—” Felicia lent Mr. Kujou her shoulder as she tried to scramble away, but her knees buckled, and she collapsed. She had already reached her limit. Her body was limp.

She was just a few yards away.

If only she could inch forward, she would be able to avoid the collision… but Felicia couldn’t muster the strength.

The battle had pulled her far away from Sir Gawain. There was nothing she could do.

“…This sucks… Is this how I’ll go…?” Felicia seemed to turn the ashen color of despair, faced with impending doom.

THUMP! In the next moment, she went flying through the air. Something had hit her from behind.

She tumbled several yards forward, where she instantly got up and looked behind her…

“…Mr. Kujou?!”

Mr. Kujou had used the last of his strength to push Felicia away.

Why did he do that? Felicia couldn’t believe it.

“…I’m not telling you that I need something in exchange, but…” Mr. Kujou looked like he’d been released, speaking his final words. “…If you get the chance…please give my regards to Kotone—”

As if to stopper his request, the top part of the building and rubble came crashing down on him.

“…”

The building settled after its collapse. Silence engulfed the area.

Without regard to the Questing Beast meeting its end, Felicia stood motionless, looking at the mountain of debris before her eyes—Mr. Kujou’s gravestone.

She ruminated over his final request.

“…Why would you go so far…? Why would you go so far for her…?”

Mr. Kujou had been a villain, someone who had strayed from the path, but his love for the woman must have been…

“…Idiot…,” Felicia muttered, but there was something heartrending about her expression.

Felicia silently made the sign of the cross on herself and offered a prayer.

The stillness felt stark against the fevered battle that had unfolded moments before.

Luna and King Arthur.

Rintarou and Morgan.

Their battle had finally reached an end.

“D-did you…win…?”

“Rintarou…”

Sir Galahad, Nayuki, and Sir Kay…were wounded and collapsed, so they couldn’t watch the battle. They stared at the place as if they were there in body, but not in spirit.

“Hah…! Hah…?! *Cough?!* Gah?!”

“…”

Luna heaved in ragged breaths and stood still. In front of her, King Arthur crouched.

“Ah… No… But I finally…got this far…” Dragging her body that had returned to her witch form, Morgan attempted to crawl along the ground to escape.

Rintarou silently followed her with his eyes.

Already slick with blood, Morgan’s face was starting to dampen from tears. She stretched her arm out into empty space as if seeking something… She kept inching across the floor…

“I would have…seen him…in just a bit longer…! I’ve been dying to see… the one I love…! But… Why…?”

Morgan’s hand eventually slumped as if she had lost her strength…

“…Why…? Acco…lo… I just wanted…to see you…one more time…”

…Then she went silent. Her body softened into mist and vanished.

After toying with the King Arthur Succession Battle and the fates of Rintarou’s group, the wicked witch met her final moment.

“…I imagine you had something you didn’t want to give up…something you wanted to make happen, even if you needed to trample on others to make it occur…” Rintarou sheathed his two swords. “Not that we’ll ever solve that mystery…”

That was how battles were. The fighting was to achieve a goal that wasn’t up for discussion. They had no option but to engage in battle for these things. This was true for all parties involved. Even for the Kings who had been eliminated before they met. Even for Mr. Kujou, maybe.

“… Luna.” Rintarou turned around and walked over to stand next to Luna, whose shoulders were heaving.

King Arthur was facing down and kneeling in front of her. Particles of mana were spilling from him. His form was slowly thinning.

“…Looks like it’s over,” Rintarou observed.

“It seems that way,” Luna said.

“Yeah, that’s right… It’s all done now…,” King Arthur muttered. “I wish I hadn’t been summoned in this form, but…I’m glad I met you… Both of you… Merlin…and…Luna…”

“Same here.”

“Ditto.”

Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad watched in silence.

“…”

“Luna… You’re the true king. You’re my successor.”

“Well, duh!”

“Merlin… No, you’re Rintarou now… Please support her…” King Arthur smiled mischievously. “Make sure you don’t abandon her partway through this time.”

“I know,” Rintarou answered with a strained smile, seeming slightly sulky.

Then… King Arthur turned around to Sir Kay, who was watching their conversation from a slight distance away. “My sister… And all of you… Luna’s a difficult one, but please take care of her…”

“*…Sniffle…hiccup…* I know… I already know…!” Sir Kay sobbed.

“Yes,” Nayuki said. “I understand, my King.”

“…If that’s a wish from my old master,” Sir Galahad replied.

“…Now I’ll finally be able to be free… I’ll be able to return to Avalon without worry…,” King Arthur murmured as if he was content…when something happened.

Ba-dmp…

The world roused, restless. They would sense chaos squirming in a place unseen.

“Huh? What was that just now…?” Luna blinked in surprise.

“What the hell…?!” Rintarou barked.

“B-but…it’s *too soon…*!” King Arthur cried out, continuing to slip away from existence.

“Lahat Chereb is trembling…! This evil presence must be…?!” Sir Kay shouted, feeling the quiver of her sword.

“Are they fusing…? Is the Curtain of Consciousness collapsing…? Are the real world and the illusory world starting to merge…?!” Nayuki asked, feeling the shift in the air.

“Did we…not make it?! No! But back then, we…!” Sir Galahad realized what was happening.

Fear made their hearts sink. They stood in a daze.

Ba-dmp, ba-dmp, ba-dmp… The world’s pulse quickened, quivering.

Ggghhh. The island started to groan, rocked by a violent earthquake. Darkness flooded from the sky, the ocean, and the earth and covered the entire world. A shadowy tsunami seemed to advance on them as if dragging the world into the bottom of the ocean.

“Wait! Wait! What?! What *is* this?! Weren’t we going to get our happy ending?”

“No… You didn’t make it in time…” King Arthur raised his face. “It’s a new day. The Wild Hunt has begun… It’s unfortunate that it’s happened.”

“Wait! But I thought I beat the living crap out of you to stop you from leading the procession!” Luna protested.

“But it still succeeded on this artificial island. Didn’t you see the apparitions in the sky? They cracked through the Curtain of Consciousness. The Catastrophe is occurring, though on a smaller scale…”

“What…?!”

“And I bet you know who’s behind the Wild Hunt… I bet you know their objective.”

“Balor…the Demon Lord!” *Scrunch.* Luna firmed her grip on her broken sword.

“If this was just a small Catastrophe, a powerful creature wouldn’t be able to worm through the barrier to the real world, but…it seems he wanted it by any means possible… Look.”

King Arthur raised his hand. His hand…was corroded by darkness. His entire body was gradually being stained in shadows.

“That’s…?!”

“A reverse summons. Balor twisted my essence and form when he summoned me to this world…so I have a spiritual connection to him… He’s using that to force a bigger gap in the Curtain of Consciousness and come into the real world through my body… As long as he has a vessel…it’s not impossible.”

Luna recalled something. At the end of the Holy Grail quest, Balor had eroded away Vivian’s body and appeared in front of them.

“But…what are we supposed to do?! That’s kind of going to be an issue!”

“Unfortunately…there’s nothing you can… Heh-heh…ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” King Arthur started to laugh loudly.

His shadowy body began to bubble up, transforming. With the unpleasant sound of flesh snapping, he staggered back, looking like he was in pain. The lump that used to be King Arthur took one step back, then another… Eventually, in front of the speechless group, he fell right down from the throne room that had been fully exposed to the wind.

Ahead of where he plunged spread darkness and chaos.

“Take this to heart, spawn of fools.”

“…If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.”

The mass of a shadow placed its gigantic hand on the edge of the castle, growing into a mountain large enough they had to crane their necks to fully take it in. It existed outside the boundaries of the imaginable…a harbinger from a nightmare.

The stature and strange visage that manifested looked like a muscular ogre god with white hair like a demon’s. Its golden right eye jerked open. For some reason, its left eye remained closed. It was far taller than Dark Castle Camelot, its frame nearly piercing the clouds.

Even seeing its form was visual overload. The ruler of the Fomorians had finally made his advent into this world.

“Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! I’ve done it! I have finally done it! I am Balor! The Evil-Eyed Demon Lord! After eons…I finally reign over this world! Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

All of them could only look up at the beast, stunned into silence.

“Balor… Has he come into this world…?!” Rintarou groaned as he gazed up at the nightmare overhead.

This was on another level compared to the Balor who Rintarou fought during the quest for the Holy Grail. That had been nothing but a piece of him. It was something that had been split from Balor’s full form.

“Frail little humans! Feast your eyes on my almighty form! Remember the dread I inspire! Here once more is the destruction you wished for, the reign of evil in which I rule over humanity!”

Balor extended his arms. Waterspouts of darkness rose from all over the artificial island and turned into a gigantic tidal wave, flooding the center of the island.

It was like a natural disaster on a whole different scale. And they could do nothing about it.

Before they knew it, all the land of the artificial island had been sucked into the shadowy ocean bottom.

The tidal wave of darkness advanced on them, taller than skyscrapers.

“Wh-what?! What is that?! Just what’s happening…?!” In a daze, Felicia looked up at the wave advancing on her.

“W-we should go! Felicia! We can’t do anything against that!”

Reuniting with Felicia, Sir Gawain tugged on her hand.

“But…where…?”

“T-to…”

The darkness closed in on them, light becoming dimmer and dimmer. Shadows encroached on their space.

“Don’t tell me we didn’t make it in time?!” Mordred gaped at the wave taller than the buildings advancing on her.

“Ah, well, seems we lost the wager… Don’t think my forecasts were too far off the mark, though…” Sir Dinadan crushed an emptied cigarette box in his hand.

“Dammit! After we made it this far…! Isn’t there anything we can do…?!” Sir Mordred bashed at the ground in frustration.

“…” He watched her, looking displeased.

The darkness closed in on them, light becoming dimmer and dimmer. Shadows encroached on their space.

“I-I’m scared… I’m scared, Sir Percival…”

“…Nanami… It’s all right. I’m here with you…”

Nanami had latched on to him.

“I’m sorry… If I just hadn’t used that last Royal Road, you wouldn’t have to…,” Emma muttered, but Sir Percival limply shook his head.

“No… Nothing would have changed. The world would have ended anyway…”

The darkness closed in on them, light becoming dimmer and dimmer. Shadows encroached on their space.

“Luna Artur…after all that bragging…!” Misha shrieked at the muddy stream while she watched the approaching tidal wave.

“Don’t be unreasonable,” Sir Palamedes murmured as if to placate her. “The opponent was just too strong… What could we have done?”

“I know! But I thought she might have been able to do something! I’m just frustrated…! I’m frustrated at myself for relying on others without being able to do anything myself…!”

“Misha…”

The darkness closed in on them, light becoming dimmer and dimmer. Shadows encroached on their space.

Then it swallowed up the entire city, merciless and indiscriminate.

It engulfed everything—everything that was there.

Anger, grief, and all—

“Wha…?”

Rintarou’s friends could only watch the scene spreading before their eyes. Most of the artificial island had already sunk into the sea. Only the very tops of a few skyscrapers were peeking out from the waves.

“W-wait a sec! But everyone is down there! That means…”

“Luna! It’s too late!”

At the moment, Luna’s team was in Castle Camelot, which stood at the highest point of the island. That was the only reason why it hadn’t been submerged in the sea of darkness yet…but the water level was slowly on the rise. It was only a matter of time until they met the same fate.

“Heh-heh-heh, do you get it, mortals? This is my power…! This is a god’s might…!” As big as a mountain, Balor looked down upon Luna, who seemed as small as a grain of rice. “Now, prostrate yourselves in despair! Quiver from the power of a god! Worship me! That’s your rightful place as mortals…!”

Balor’s presence seemed to inflate—more and more and more. His very existence and demonic divinity alone could crush Luna’s group to death.

“Huh?!” Luna checked the situation.

All my friends in the sea are gone… Sir Kay, Nayuki, and Sir Galahad can’t fight… I’m dead tired, injured, and my Excalibur is broken… I don’t need to reassess this situation to know it’s hopeless…

All she could do was give up at this point. Just like Balor said.

“But…I have you, Rintarou.” Luna smiled boldly and stabilized her broken blade.

“Yeah, you’ve got me, Luna.” Rintarou readied his pair of swords. “This is the true form of Merlin’s father… Obviously, he’s unimaginably strong… This doesn’t even compare to the little offshoot from before… But strangely, I don’t feel like we’re going to lose.”

“Same.”

“Maybe if I were alone. Then, I might have been on my knees. But with you, I can fight as long as you give me orders… I can turn my sword against my rotten old man!”

“Then I don’t suppose you’ll mind me giving you an order?”

“Give me anything you got, my King.”

Luna smiled boldly. “This is a royal order, Rintarou! Fight alongside me! Kill that demon lord with me!”

“Got it!” Rintarou looked up at Balor. “C’mon! Come at me! Balor! I’m Rintarou Magami! I’m the vassal of Luna Artur, the true king who will rule the world! And I’ve been ordered to beat the crap out of you!”

“You’re a fool, my unworthy son! Die in the embrace of darkness!” Balor brought his boulder-like hand down on Rintarou. His fist had a meteoritic impact and seemed as if it could have flattened Castle Camelot like a pancake.

Even if Rintarou performed a miracle, it was impossible to dodge it or take the blow.

“Aaaaaaaah!” But he withstood it, swinging his two swords and wielding his rebellious blades at his father.

The darkness, however, was too overwhelming. Rintarou did nothing as the shadows tried to crush him into mulch and swallow him…

KRRK! Light flooded the space. It came from his body and repelled the darkness.

Like a comet, an aurora borealis spread out in the sky, nearly blinding them. Its divine light expanded in all directions, clearing away the shadows like sunrise. The sea of darkness that had sunk the city shrunk away as if scared of the light.

—

“I-is this…?”

Their consciousnesses and bodies that had partially melted into the darkness returned to their previous states. Felicia stared at her own hands and blinked.

“Felicia…look,” Sir Gawain urged. “The shadows are subsiding…”

She looked around to find them retreating like an ebbing tide. The city was being returned to its previous state.

“…!” Felicia turned her eyes toward the source of the light that had saved them.

The summit of Dark Castle Camelot. Like a lighthouse guiding fishermen, its light cut through the dead of night. Castle Camelot quickly returned to its original splendor.

“…”

“…”

Felicia and Sir Gawain watched that divine flare for a while. Eventually, the two looked at each other and nodded, then…

—

“What?!” Balor screamed, burned by the light. “Impossible… Why do you have the same light as a certain someone?! What’s happening?!”

Balor wasn’t the only one perplexed by this.

“…What the hell is this…?!” Rintarou himself was stunned.

“Huh? Rintarou… What is this? I thought you used dark magic only?” Luna blinked as she watched from behind him.

“What could this light be…? I feel like my wounded body…is recovering…?”

“Wh-what in the world…? What happened to Rintarou…?”

“No way…!”

Sir Galahad and Sir Kay opened their eyes wide.

Nayuki murmured what came to her mind. “In that past…I was beckoned to this island and urged to guide Rintarou by two of the Goddesses of Fate—Lady Badb and Lady Macha. They told me, ‘*By having Merlin serve the true King Arthur, the Catastrophe can be steered off course…*’”

“In other words, Merlin is both the key to kill King Arthur and bring about the global destruction…and the key to world salvation…?” Sir Galahad asked.

Nayuki nodded.

Sir Galahad seemed like she realized something. “I see! That makes perfect sense! In the past, Lugh—god of light for the Dananns—defeated Balor during the Second Battle of Mag Tuired… Do you all know who Lugh is?!”

“!” Nayuki seemed like she got it. She blinked in surprise. “I know! Lugh is Balor’s *grandchild…*part of Balor’s family line…! Right?!”

“Yes! Though Lugh is part of the Dananns, he was a shadow figure that shared blood with Balor! But *he was reborn when he decided to rebel against Balor*!”

“In other words, Rintarou is planning to rebel against him…by serving Luna, the true king…?”

“Yeah. And there’s a curse-like legend that Balor will be ‘killed by his own kin…’” Sir Kay added.

Sir Galahad nodded. “I’m convinced Rintarou is close to Lugh!”

Rintarou’s light started to flood the space, reaching all corners to burn away the sea that attempted to suck them all in. The sunken city was regaining its original form.

“D-don’t tell me…! You can’t possibly be the same as him, Merlin… The god of light was a traitor…! No! He was worse than that…!”

Someone else’s voice echoed in Rintarou’s head. “Good job, partner… That’s great… Now we can finally get rid of that revolting curse placed on me by our rotten father and those Goddesses of Fate, those tramps… No, placed on us…”

“Is that you…Id…?!”

Rintarou swore he saw a glimpse of something, almost like his life flashing before his eyes. He didn’t understand why, but he saw every possible version of himself from the different outcomes in the King Arthur Succession Battle.

In one, he fought by backing Felicia as king.

In one, he fought by backing Emma as king.

In one, he fought by backing Sir Mordred as king.

In one, he fought by backing Nanami as king.

In one, he fought by backing Misha as king.

All his kings went through their own dramatic revelations, adventures, and twists and turns, coming to trust him in the end.

And then they would win against their opponents and survive…and then they would defeat Luna's camp, which always stuck around until the end for some reason…

His chosen king would be killed by Rintarou, who let the curse take hold of him.

Then, the world would be shuttered away in darkness.

And the wheel of fate would turn, winding all of it back…

"…What are these memories…?"

What made destiny steer off course? Why had this happened? The root of everything was…

"Ha-ha-ha. If you've got that much time on your hands, Rintarou Magami…why don't you participate in the King Arthur Succession Battle?"

The dark witch—Morgan le Fay—had appeared in front of Rintarou in the past.

"Here are cards with the particulars of each King participating… Please read all of them. Surely, that advantage will bring you to victory.

"Hmm? Are you sure you want to go with the first card you pick? Are you going to choose her without examining the details of the other Kings?

"Hee-hee-hee…Well, I suppose that'll do, too… May luck be on your side."

"Did my destiny fork off when I chose a random King like a *gacha* game at the very beginning…? Did it change based on who I chose to support…?"

Merlin was cursed to select and then kill King Arthur. Once that mission was complete, there would be no King Arthur to grace the world for all of eternity.

Where would Merlin's soul reincarnate after he had chosen and killed King Arthur? Into whom would Merlin reincarnate? Did he even have to be reborn?

Well, obviously—

"Hah, I could care less."

It wouldn't do any good for him to speculate. At this point, it didn't matter.

"I haven't got a clue what's going on, but…I don't give a crap as long as I get to beat you up!" Rintarou yelled. As he felt the power of the light surging in his entire body, he readied his two swords to face Balor.

Balor looked spitefully at him. "You…! You don't even have Lugh's spear or the Tathlum sling-stone! Even you won't be able to destroy me…!" He noticed something. "What is that sword…?! What in the world are you planning…?! What the hell is this?!" Balor yelled in agitation and horror.

He was staring behind Rintarou.

"Huh?" Rintarou turned around. "Wh-what's this?"

At some point… The sword Luna held had been reborn.

Its design was influenced by Luna's Sword of Camaraderie, but it had been reformed to be even more magnificent, more valiant, more powerful, more radiant.

Gone was the broken, pitiable blade. A king's sword had been born in Luna's hands, shining even more brilliantly than the light Rintarou emitted.

"It's a gift from me..."

"Arthur?!"

King Arthur, faint and transparent as a ghost, was calmly standing next to Luna.

"Are you back to your normal self?!" Rintarou asked.

"My body that was reverse summoned by Balor was devoured by him... which means my soul and mind were released from his control... In exchange, I won't be able to exist in this world any longer..."

"...Arthur..."

"Right now, I'm not Arthur the Demon Lord, twisted by Balor, but the original king of Britain... I guess none of that matters." King Arthur turned to face Luna directly and smiled. "Luna. You're my successor—the successor of the true king. You need a fitting sword for your coronation, I figured. So I fused a fragment of my Excalibur to your Excalibur... This is your second sword from me."

"Forefather..."

"This is about the only thing this disappointing forefather of yours can manage..."

Luna seemed in a daze as she stared at King Arthur, who gave her a carefree smile.

"Arthur, you..." Rintarou started.

"Merlin... No, Rintarou... I leave Luna and the world in your hands..."

Then wind whistled through the space...and King Arthur winked out of sight.

"..."

"... Rintarou," Luna said.

He nodded. "...Think you can do it?"

"Of course."

"And how's the new sword looking?"

"Hmm...its inscription has changed."

"..."

"But nothing has changed about its ability."

"So...does that mean I can do the thing I always do...?"

"Yeah! I'm counting on you, Rintarou!"

"Got it!" He gave her a spirited response, and wings of light manifested themselves on his back. "Here we go!" Rintarou flapped them once and flew straight toward Balor.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaah! C-curse you!"

Balor flung his arms out at Rintarou.

The final battle was beginning.

"AAAAAAAAAAH!" Rintarou brought out his swords.

"Dieeeeeeeeee!" Balor's fists crashed straight down on him like boulders.

Based on the difference in their sizes, it was like an ant going up against an elephant. It seemed there was just no feasible way Rintarou would win.

The impact shook heaven and earth.

Balor's rocklike fists were deflected by Rintarou's swords, and his large frame was thrown back. In this initial clash, Rintarou had won.

"Wh-whaaaaaaaaaaaat?!"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! C'mon! I can do this all day!" Rintarou flapped his wings of light and closed in on the staggering beast. "Raaaaaaaaaaah!"

He went right in to cut Balor.

The tracks left behind by the slash of light left a cross running along Balor's torso.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAH?!"

"There's more where that came from!" He moved even faster and more freely, zipping through the air. He slipped right by Balor. Each time he passed, he would hit Balor with blows all over his gigantic frame, again, and again, and again.

Balor's wounds glowed like an aurora borealis was snaking around his body. Unable to stand it, he let out a pained wail that almost reached the heavens.

"…!" Luna raised her shining sword in both her hands and quietly *closed her eyes*. She did so before Balor, the almighty beast, and foolishly left herself defenseless.

She could do such a thing because she believed in Rintarou.

"You…are not to underestimate me!" Balor boomed.

Darkness coiled around Luna…and took form. Apparitions.

He had summoned a whole host of them around her when she was most vulnerable.

"Tsk!" As soon as Rintarou saw that, he tried to immediately return to Luna.

"Lahat Chereb!" The holy flames glittered, swirling to create an eddy.

"Haaaaaah!" Wielded were the sword and spear that only a saint could brandish.

"No you don't!" Ice spears and an absolute zero storm tore through the space, freezing the apparitions that had appeared around Luna.

The trio who had appeared to protect Luna were…

"Sir Kay! Nayuki! Galahad?! Guys!" Rintarou shouted.

"Leave protecting Luna to us, Rintarou!" Sir Kay brandished Lahat Chereb and halted the waves of apparitions that rose.

"That's right! Our role is to be bait right now!" Sir Galahad said as she slashed her sword and spear several hundred times to send the apparitions flying.

"Rintarou, you take on Balor! You have to stop his treachery that's continued since ancient times! Please!" Nayuki brandished an ice sword as she controlled a snowstorm and sent back the approaching ghouls.

Though the shadows materialized from empty space one after another… not a single apparition had been able to lay a finger on Luna.

“Oh yeah! I love that I can trust my friends!” Rintarou hooted.

“C-curse you… Curse youuuu!”

“Hey, now’s not the time to be getting distracted by others!” Rintarou used this opportunity to fly through the air like a meteor, rocketing past Balor’s side.

In an instant, he was assaulted by near infinite beams of light that left him with lacerations.

“GAAAAAAAAAAH! Damn you! Damn you!”

Balor swung his arms all over, unable to stand still. He tried to smack down Rintarou, who buzzed around him like a pesky fly and left a trail of light in his wake.

“Oh?! Someone’s slow!”

Rintarou did a barrel roll, looping around and pulling a chandelle maneuver. He was following a ridiculous trajectory and continued to evade all attacks.

“You little! Curse youuu!” Balor howled, vexed.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

As he laughed in perfect health, Rintarou zoomed around Balor, delivering nasty cuts.

Rintarou had completely overwhelmed Balor.

“*Don’t underestimate me…mere mortals!*” Balor howled in rage, and then he started to collect a dark Aura. Balor’s power was increasing.

“Urk?!”

Balor’s gigantic fist had enough force to blow away the atmosphere, and it caught Rintarou for the first time. Though he took most of the impact with his two swords, its strength drove Rintarou far back. He opened his light wings to dampen the momentum and stopped in midair…

“Tsk… Rotten old man… You’ve gotten faster and stronger…! So you were still hiding your powers…!”

“Why, naturally! Who do you think I am?! I’m the god meant to rule the world!” Balor smiled triumphantly. “And I’ll show you all! This is how devastatingly different mortals are from me, a god…!”

Balor placed his finger on his left eyelid, which was firmly closed. He used all his might to try opening that eyelid.

“Huh?! That’s… Crap! This is bad…!”

Balor’s heavy left eyelid covered the Evil Eye of Death. It was the most sinister eye in the world, and through its gaze, it could reap the lives of any living being. No one could resist.

His eyelid was so heavy that he had to strain to open it, but once he did, its power was tremendous. If he managed to do that now, they wouldn’t be able to do anything. The outcome of the battle would be overturned in mere moments.

Rintarou instantly turned into a flash of light and charged to prevent this from happening.

However…in front of him were several wyverns born from the darkness, spreading their wings and standing in his way.

“Get outta here!”

Obviously, wyverns were no match for Rintarou in his current state. He sliced them with flashes of light as he slipped past them, making them come crashing down.

But there were just too many of them.

Rintarou was losing speed and having to take the long way around to get to Balor.

“Gwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! This is how it ends!”

Using that opportunity, Balor tried to push up his eyelid…but something stopped him.

“Royal Road—Radiant Sword Steel of Glory!”

FLASH! A dazzling flash of light zipped through the sky and weakened the wyverns.

“Royal Road—Sword of Destruction!”

Daggers rained down like a meteoric shower, skewering the wyverns and sending them to the ground.

“AAAAAAAAAAH!”

In that opening, Rintarou soared through the air, lightning quick, advancing on Balor’s partially open left eye. Like an arrow of light flying through the night sky, Rintarou thrust his swords into the center of his eyeball with all his might.

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!”

His prized left eye blinded, Balor shrieked in anguish and backed away.

“You guys…?!” Rintarou looked down after leaping away from the space where Balor stood…

“I’ll cover you, Rintarou!”

“Yeah, you just focus on Balor!”

At some point, Felicia and Sir Mordred had made their way over here.

They weren’t the only ones.

“Rintarou! We’ll protect Luna!”

Sir Gawain was there, too.

“Even I can fight the weaker apparitions…!”

And Emma.

“We’ll protect, and you attack… That’s the most efficient way of doing things anyway!”

Sir Dinadan.

“I doubt my abilities will amount to much, but I’ll help, too!”

Sir Percival.

“Hmph. Fine… I’ll let the two of you steal this show!”

“Sheesh. You really can’t be honest about your feelings, can you…?”

Misha and Sir Palamedes were there, too.

Everyone had gathered around Luna.

They were fighting to protect her from the horde of apparitions that were advancing like a tidal wave.

“Haaaaaaaaaah!” Sir Gawain’s sword struck them down.

“Yaaaaaaaaaah!” Emma’s dynamic swordsmanship weaponized her opponents’ strength against them.

“Here we go!” Sir Dinadan charged with his lance on horseback.

“Hup!” Sir Percival released his throwing spears.

“Gah!” Misha unleashed a barrage.

“Hi-yah!” Sir Palamedes’s sword swiveled around with practiced grace.

They pushed back the ghouls so none of them could even get close to Luna.

“We can’t lose here…!”

“Of course not!”

“…Exactly!”

After seeing their furious display of reinforcement, Sir Galahad, Sir Kay, and Nayuki mustered all their strength to clean up the apparitions. Even with these overwhelming ghouls in front of all of them, they didn’t retreat a single step as they passionately continued to fight.

“…Whoa.” Rintarou soared through the air and looked down at the scene of everyone together. He murmured to himself, deeply moved. “Luna…you really are amazing…”

When he thought about it…the crowd was made of mostly enemies. All of them had united under Luna, fighting together under one cause. She had managed to draw in acquaintances that she’d only known for the briefest of times.

“…Yeah… You really are the best king in the world…!”

He no longer had any misgivings. Now all he had to do was beat up his annoying father.

“Raaaaaaaaaah!” Rintarou brandished his swords and soared through the air before getting closer, attacking, and going on the offensive.

He cut through the air, striking the enemy over and over.

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Balor looked like a sorry old sandbag, comically swinging in all directions as beams of light blasted into him under the night sky.

“Why…?! Whyyyyyyyyy?!” Balor howled. “Why? How could a mortal do such a thing to a god?! It wasn’t supposed to be like this… It was never supposed to be like this…!”

“Shut your trap! Keep quiet!”

“My plan was flawless… My goal that transcended time was perfect…! Then why…? …Where did the wheels of fate go wroooong?!”

“You think that everything’s gonna happen the way you want it to ’cause you’re a god?! Sounds conceited to me! You rotten old man!”

Rintarou put all his power into an attack, forming a gigantic X that assaulted Balor.

“GAAAAAAAAH?!” Balor bent back noticeably.

Just as they thought the battle would continue forever…

“Rintarou!”

At that moment, Luna suddenly called out to him, after she’d been raising her sword with her eyes closed the entire time.

She called Rintarou’s name.

“!”

Rintarou had understood everything just from that one word. He suddenly broke into a smile.

“Yeah, got it!”

Once more, he turned into a flash of light and rushed at Balor. Then, starting at his enemy’s feet, he flew around at hyperspeed, tracing a spiral around Balor up to his head.

“Gah—Aaaaaaaah?!”

In the next moment, Balor’s entire body was minced by the light.

The tendons of both ankles and the backs of his knees were severed. Lopped off were the muscles in his arms and hands, not to mention his torso. Rintarou had chopped into him, and to add to it, he had even pierced deep into Balor’s remaining right eye.

Balor staggered. He stopped moving, and his body slowly started to lurch. There was no better opportunity than now.

“I’ve got him prepped for you!” Flapping his wings, Rintarou quickly evacuated the area. “Do it! Lunaaaaaaaaaa!”

“Royal Road—” Luna suddenly opened both her eyes.

The Excalibur that Luna held up started to glow. A giant blade of light incomparable to its normal size had started to take form.

It was large enough to pierce the clouds and divide the heavens.

Everyone was lost in a trance as they speechlessly stared at that divine sword, jaws slack.

“Aaaaah… Wh-what is that…? It sparks a primal fear even in me…!”

Though Balor desperately wanted to flee, his wounded body could no longer move much.

“Impossible… I’m the demon lord who rules the Fomorians, the god who reigns over the world… Meeeeeeeeeeee!”

As if to silence Balor’s comment, Luna cried out the name of her sword, holding it up in the sky.

Her second sword that had succeeded King Arthur’s Excalibur. A blade reborn.

She said the name of her own sword.

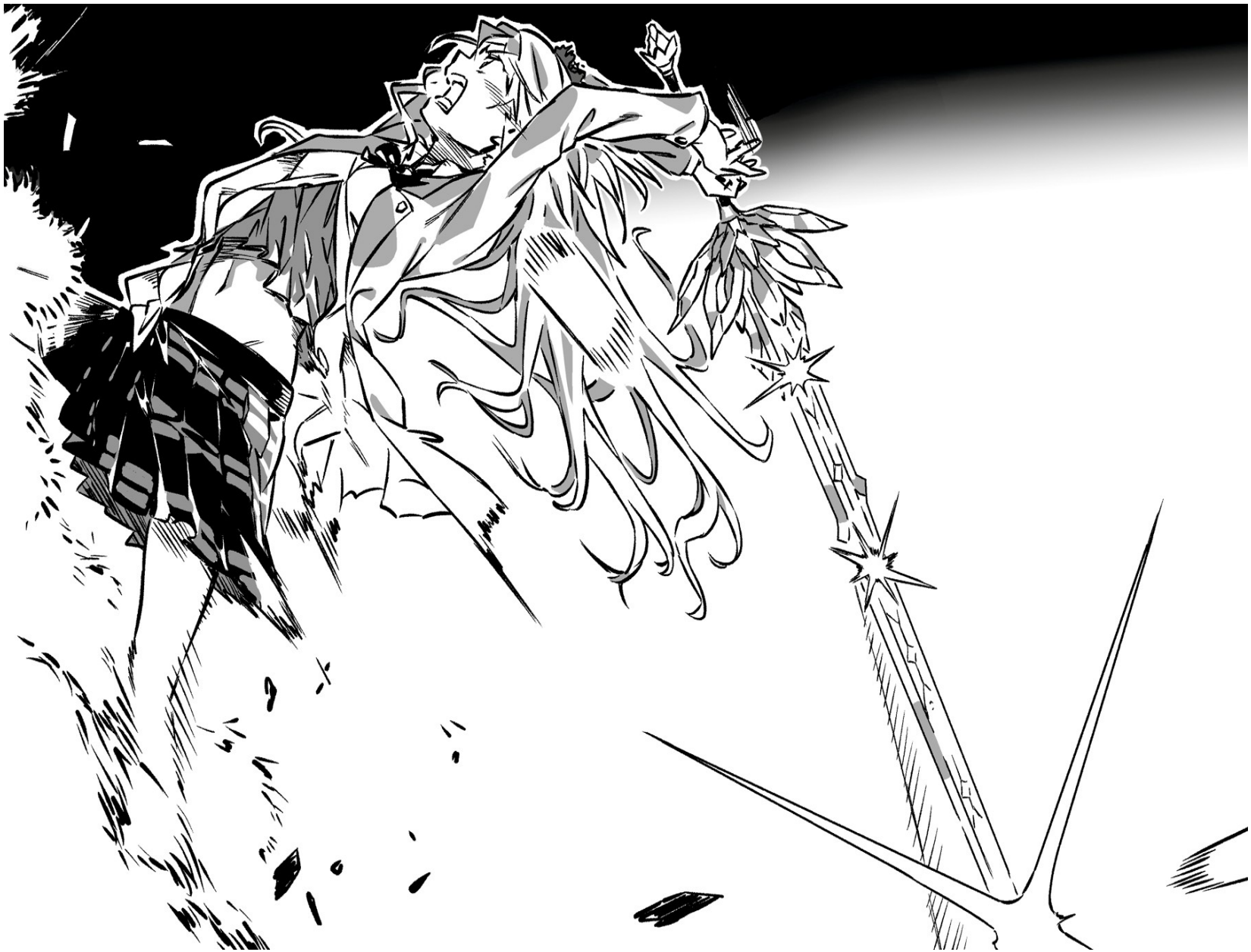
The name of it was…

“The Sword to Free the Future!”

She put all her emotions into it and all her strength. And Luna swung the sword down.

It wasn’t just Luna… The strongest sword that belong to a king housed the emotions of all who were present and displayed its power.

It was an understatement to say her blade of light cut through Balor.



…Because it seemed to *swallow him up*.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH?!”

Consumed by the light, Balor let out a screech. His vision was flooded by a bright-white world that was being scorched away.

In that dazzling light… Under its blinding glare…Balor’s outline slowly began to crumble… He was starting to vanish…like he was evaporating.

He slowly turned into fine particles, washed away in the torrent of light…

…He was carried away…until he couldn’t be seen.

“Impossible… This would never happen to me…! Not to I, Balor!”

Before long, even his final scream melted into the light…becoming quieter and quieter.

Balor…

…Balor had disappeared…from the real world.

……

……

…

FINAL CHAPTER

A New Departure

“Sniffle…hiccup… Ugh…”

In darkness that was as pitch-black as the bottom of the sea, a single girl wept, all alone.

Morgan le Fay.

She no longer had the dark allure or visible wickedness that the witch in black had. There was no sign of the divinity that she’d possessed as a goddess of battle who manipulated fate, either. All of those things had disappeared from Morgan like she had been relieved of a burden.

At that moment, Morgan was…just a girl. Nothing more.

“Accolon… Sir…Accolon…”

In the darkness, Morgan sobbed and recalled the days past.

Morgan had loved Sir Accolon and wanted to do anything she could to prove her love for him.

She had wanted to tell him how she felt. She had wanted him to love her back.

But since she was awkward and twisted by nature, she couldn’t just tell him. She wasn’t confident that he would feel the same way, especially because she was a witch.

So that was why she had made her move. She had done it in secret.

Sir Accolon was constantly teased for being average by the people around him.

If I used my powers to set up Sir Accolon as king…wouldn’t that prove my love for him? Wouldn’t that make him thank me? Wouldn’t he be so moved that he would fall in love with me?

…At the time, Morgan had truly believed that.

She was giddy with love and knew she wasn’t thinking straight. But she was spurred on by impulses she could no longer bear. She had done it all for the sake of love.

Morgan had used her prided magic and tricks to prepare artifices that would bring down King Arthur and set up Sir Accolon as king.

She traded out King Arthur’s Excalibur and his sheath of immortality for fakes and left them with Sir Accolon. She used magic so Sir Accolon could master those. Then, she made it so they didn’t recognize each other and forced the two into a duel to the death.

If Sir Accolon kills Arthur in a formal duel…anyone would recognize him as the true king… I have to make Sir Accolon our ruler… I’ve set this up,

and everything is perfect… Sir Accolon will defeat Arthur and become king… Or at least, he should have…!

Sir Accolon had Excalibur and the sheath of immortality. He couldn't lose. He couldn't have.

Morgan's plan was perfect.

Sir Accolon had overpowered King Arthur using the sword and sheath. But…he had lost. He had been killed by King Arthur.

One of the Dame du Lac who had realized Morgan's scheme had used magic to send the sheath of immortality flying away from Sir Accolon during the duel. But…the biggest reason for his defeat was that he had realized he was fighting against King Arthur and withdrawn his sword at the final moment.

King Arthur hadn't caught on that he was battling Sir Accolon, however… He had gone overboard and ended up slaying him.

King Arthur had been overcome with grief when he realized he had killed his own knight.

Apparently, the last words Sir Accolon had left the king with had been "*Please forgive Morgan.*"

In the end…Sir Accolon hadn't wanted to be king… He was normal… He was selfless and ordinary… I'm sure that was why I was attracted to him in the first place… Why did I have to do that…?!

Morgan had no idea just how long she cried in front of his corpse. It was the first time she cried like that since she had been born in this world.

Time passed.

After the death of King Arthur at Camlann Hill, the kingdom of Logres and the knights of the Round Table had collapsed.

Morgan had attempted to awaken Sir Accolon from Camlann Hill where the knights had gathered to slumber. Though ordinary, he was a knight of the Round Table, too.

His soul had also slumbered at Camlann Hill.

But…

But…he didn't stir! He wasn't able to move!

That was right.

In order to awaken a soul sleeping at Camlann Hill into the real world, they would need to be a ghost of a hero. It demanded that his name be passed down in legends, and he needed notoriety and fame that would make him memorable in the public consciousness.

Knights who had these conditions met could be summoned as Jacks.

But Sir Accolon had been too ordinary to have rested in Camlann Hill as a hero.

He wasn't valiant like Sir Lancelot and Sir Lamorak or wise like Sir Kay or Sir Dinadan. He hadn't stood out in the legends like Sir Gawain or Sir Mordred.

He had simply been normal.

If she wanted to reunite with Sir Accolon again, the Curtain of Consciousness was a fatal obstacle.

She couldn't get back together with him unless she removed the barrier between the real world and the illusory world. She needed them fused together… Otherwise, she couldn't go to Camlann Hill in order to search for him.

"That's why…I…went along with Balor…and kept going…until now…"

But it was over now.

She would disappear. Her existence would vanish.

"…No… No… Please save me… Someone… Anyone… Don't leave me alone…! I just wanted to see him… That was all…"

Even if her hopes would never be realized, it was all that was left for Morgan, a girl once betrayed by humanity and demeaned like a monster.

"…Don't leave me alone… It's lonely here… I'm lonely…"

This entreaty aimed at no one was in vain.

Morgan was alone as she tried to melt and disappear into the darkness…

…Then, something happened.

"…Sheesh… You're hopeless," said a voice, weary and somewhat offhand.

It was a voice that Morgan would have abandoned anything for, just to hear again… It was a nostalgic voice.

"…What?" Morgan noticed someone had come to stand behind her.

"Ah. Good grief. I always need to keep an eye on you… There's no telling what kind of trouble you'll cause others… I could never slumber at Camlann Hill in peace…"

"…" Morgan was speechless.

She couldn't bring herself to turn around. She kept her face down.

"…What's wrong, Morgan?"

"I can't…I can't face you…"

"What?"

"I mean…I did so many terrible things to see you… I realized something, now that I've heard your voice… I don't have the right to see you anymore. I lost it a long time ago…"

"Well, maybe that's true." The person behind her answered with a sigh. "To be blunt, you always take things too far, even in the past. I imagine humanity will remember you forever as a rare breed of witch and an atrocious villainess… It's likely you'll never come back as a goddess again."

"…"

"But you know…" A certain someone gently hugged Morgan from behind. "…Don't you deserve at least one person to stay by your side?"

"…!" Morgan couldn't process anything for a while…

Eventually, her shoulders quivered, and she started to cry.

"Sorry… I'm so…sorry…! Accolon…*sniffle…hiccup…* Ugh…ah…ah… I… I…"

"…Let's go, Morgan. It's fine… I'm with you. Forever…"

The two drew each other close and slowly disappeared, slipping into the darkness.

As for what would happen to them…

No one knew.

…

The international city of Avalonia.

On the sprawling artificial island of New Avalon, the city off the coast of the Japanese archipelago had been constructed with cutting-edge technology.

The King Arthur Succession Battle had secretly been taking place in its city limits.

And the Wild Hunt was about to depart from there, too.

The incident that could have changed the world forever had been resolved before it happened, through the devices of a single girl and her friends.

That said, it had left a big blemish on the world.

For starters, common sense had been turned inside out during this incident, especially because information traveled fast in modern society. The Curtain of Consciousness sustained a big fissure.

As a consequence, apparition and fairy appearances were able to slip into this world more easily, which turned into a serious societal issue. Governments from every country had to pursue methods of dealing with those.

The ancient gods did not immediately make an advent, which would create a fatal situation, but the incident called for humans to become more comfortable with the idea of magic and ghosts.

And New Avalon Island, the eye of the storm, had turned into a strange space after the real world and the illusory world fused together. It was where apparitions, fairies, and the residents of the illusory world lived with humanity.

The international city of Avalonia had departed from common sensibilities and logic. As a result, the population of people possessing clairvoyant powers or magic seemed to explode.

This seemingly absurd place couldn’t be managed by humans or governments that were part of the real world. Its governance was entrusted in the hands of certain well-qualified individuals.

Then…

“Hm?” Felicia Ferald noticed another visitor already at her destination.

She was in Area Four, the common cemetery. Western tombstones formed neat rows in the sunny graveyard where gentle air was adrift.

In front of a grave marker on which the name Souma Gloria Kujou was carved, there was an ephemeral woman standing alone.

“Hello. Did you also come to offer flowers to Souma?” asked the woman.

“Yes.” Felicia noticed bunches of flowers had already been offered on Mr. Kujou’s grave.

Mr. Kujou… I heard he was a good teacher… I guess I can say we're all complex beings that aren't just one dimensional…

After she offered a bouquet of flowers, she made the sign of the cross on herself and prayed.

Mr. Kujou had been linked to Felicia in many ways, and there was bad blood between them, but there was no need to speak ill of the dead. She would wish for his peace in death as a kindred spirit. They had both been humble aristocrats with a reason to fight… She had made her way here today because she felt close to him in that regard.

For a while, Felicia offered prayers alongside the woman.

"I'm Felicia. Felicia Ferald," she eventually said. "I'm an old friend of Mr. Kujou… And who might you be?"

"…I'm Kotone Tachibana… I was Mr. Kujou's…Souma's fiancée…"

"Miss…Kotone…?" Felicia flinched, eyes going slightly wide.

"…Is something the matter?"

"No, um… Nothing at all…" Felicia tried to brush it off, making her look a little awkward. "So you were Mr. Kujou's fiancée, Miss Kotone… I'm terribly sorry for your loss," she offered, battling something inside her.

"…Thank you." Kotone smiled in a way that was simply heartbreaking.

…At that moment, Felicia realized something. Her spiritual senses and sight identified Kotone's true nature.

"Were you born from a very old spirit…?"

"Hm? Did you say something?"

"N-no…nothing at all."

Her cryptic words would soon become common knowledge, but…it probably wasn't the right time to explain herself.

Felicia kept her mouth shut in a fluster. B-but it's so strange that an old spirit's blood could manifest itself so strongly… It's certainly possible now, but she shouldn't have been able to live for very long before this incident…

Felicia was having some suspicions…

"But…it seems like things have been such a mess lately… It all feels like a dream." Kotone smiled easily. "With the fairies showing up all over town… and more people who can use magic…and terrifying ghouls wandering at night…and all those brave knights protecting us from monsters…it almost feels like a fairy tale."

"It really does. Everything has changed on this island since that incident."

"And speaking of changes…I used to have an unexplainable illness until recently. I was on the verge of death. I mean, I couldn't even go outside…"

"!" Felicia's shoulders trembled.

"But since everything went down…um, since the real world and the illusory world fused, I suppose, I was cured of my terminal illness. It was like it never happened."

"…" Felicia was silent.

Kotone must have realized something. She continued to stare at the tombstone before her eyes. “The doctors all told me it was a miracle. But…I thought that my illness disappeared because of Souma, I’m sure…”

“…”

“I have no idea what Souma did. But…I’m convinced he saved me…”

“…Yes, I’m sure he did,” Felicia murmured, unable to endure it. “I’m sure he battled hard to save you. I…believe that, too.”

“…Yes… I’m…so happy…that Souma loved me so much… I’m so happy… but…”

Pitter, patter... Droplets plinked against the tombstone.

“Why can’t I stop crying…?”

“…Miss Kotone…”

For a while, Felicia was silent as she continued to stand next to her.

…

“You’re laaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaate!” screeched a terribly unhappy voice when Felicia made her way to the place.

“Felicia! Being late is a felony! You’re practically begging for the death penalty!”

“You’re such a tyrant… Are you sure you’re all okay with this…?”

They were in the Round Table Room in a corner of Castle Camelot.

Dark Castle Camelot had been purified after the incident, and Luna’s team had decided to go ahead and use it for certain purposes, since nothing really happened to the castle’s structure.

When Felicia looked around with unimpressed eyes, she saw there were people at the Round Table… The participants were already surrounding it.

Luna sat at the head of the table, the first seat, her legs shamelessly thrown up on the surface.

“No need to be upset…Felicia told you she would be a little late…” Sir Kay sat in the third seat (in a bunny outfit, for whatever reason).

“That’s right… Felicia is busy, after all…,” Nayuki added from where she sat primly in the fourth seat.

“What a terrific cast of members… Should I really be here…?” Emma asked from where she sat at the fifth seat (wearing a maid uniform).

“Do you even hear yourself? You’re a hero who saved this island, too! I refuse to entertain a single word about you not being qualified to sit with us when your swordsmanship is already Round Table material!”

“Oh, Luna? What’s the point of the costumes you had Sir Kay and me wear…?”

“There’s no point.”

“Whaaat…?”

“…No use fighting this, Emma…”

The girls engaged in harmless conversation.

“Ha-ha-ha, nothing has changed about any of you.”

In the seventh seat, Sir Gawain put on a strained smile.

“…Ah… I’m worried for the future of this island and the world if this is how we’re all behaving…,” Sir Mordred grumbled in the eighth seat.

“Ha-ha-ha. I think it’s fun.” Sir Dinadan in the ninth seat added his own impressions.

“…Come to think of it, is Nanami doing all right?”

“Yeah, she’s great. She’s doing well in school. Why? That’s strange. Didn’t think you were one to concern yourself about other people.”

“Hmph.” Misha turned away in the eleventh seat from Sir Percival in the tenth seat.

“Ha-ha-ha. You just can’t be honest, can you? You should tell her that you want to apologize for attacking her in the past.”

“Watch your mouth. Shut up.” Misha barked at Sir Palamedes in the twelfth seat.

“What a view,” Sir Galahad said happily in the thirteenth seat as she looked around. “I never would have thought that the Round Table would get back together! I’m glad I came back to life… Unlike the other side of the partition, this world always has something new and exciting going on. I’m never bored.”

“Right?! Right?! Ha-ha! You’d better thank me!” Luna grinned and puffed up her chest… “Oh, but…Sir Galahad… You’ve been really weirdly clingy with Rintarou. Like more than you need to be…” She glared at her reproachfully.

“Huh? I have no idea what you mean.” Sir Galahad cocked her head to the side and opened her eyes wide in a cute way.

“Just so you know… If you lay a hand on my vassal without my permission, you’ll get the death penalty! The death penalty, I tell you!”

“Whaaat? I can’t believe you’d do something so horrible! You’d give me the death penalty even though I’m the second strongest after Rintarou? Look out folks, we have a tyrant over here.”

“Zip it! A king’s order is the law, you know!”

“But don’t you think Rintarou gets to decide? Well, I suppose…you are in a one-step lead for now. Heh-heh-heh…”

“U-ugh …! I’ve finally gotten a good look at her real personality…! How are you supposed to be the holiest saint?! Have the gods in heaven got holes for eyes?!” Luna fumed as she continued to glare at Sir Galahad, who smiled in delight.

“Phew. It seems the Round Table is as chaotic as usual…” Felicia took her own seat in exasperation…the sixth seat. “The revamped Round Table… Well, I was wondering what was going to happen. I guess the most important thing is that it’s sort of functioning.”

“In exchange, Sir Kay and Sir Dinadan have got their work cut out for them, though…,” Sir Gawain, next to her, grumbled as he looked away. “Since they’re currently directing and supervising the whole city.”

“I suppose that’s to be expected from the kingdom of Logres’s former cabinet administrator and strategist-cum-negotiator, who was supporting the country from the shadows…”

That was right. The ones currently governing this artificial island were Luna’s team.

That was because, at present, with the illusory world having corroded away at common sensibilities, no normal governance had a chance at managing things.

Originally, the Dame du Lac had burrowed into the island’s upper stratum to meddle with its administration, but after Luna’s team joined hands with the remaining members of this organization, the transfer of duties had gone smoothly.

Luna had taken up leadership on this island that had inched closer to the illusory world. The new knights of her Round Table were protecting the island residents from apparitions that threatened them.

“Well, she’s doing a good job, considering she’s also in charge of the student council at school.”

“Though I do feel like she’s making a terrible mistake holding both positions at the same time.”

Felicia and Sir Gawain grumbled at the side.

“Anyway!” *BAM!* Luna rapped the Round Table. “It’s time to start the four hundred and thirty-seventh Round Table discussion! The topic today is recruiting human capital and imposing a training program for fighting with swords and magic to maintain the safety on this island! And all girls in their teens to their twenties will be required to wear bikini armor that yours truly designed—”

“This isn’t really important, but have there been so many conferences…?”

“Shuddup! You’re out of line, Felicia! It’s always better if things sound impressive, right?!”

“Uh, Luna, what was that about required bikini armor? You never told me about that…”

“Oh, Sir Kay! Emma! We got the samples in, so you two can try them on later!”

“”Eeeeek?!””

“Umm… Rintarou isn’t here yet…” Nayuki raised a demure hand as she looked at the empty second seat.

“Oyyyyy! Just leave it! I know I told him to come today right after school! I’m not letting him off the hook this time! I’ll get him at school tomorrow!”

With a disorganized start, the conference that really didn’t seem fit to represent the government began…

BAAAM!

Suddenly, the door was forcibly kicked open from outside. And the person who stood beyond the opened door was…

“Yo! You all here?”

“Rintarou?!”

All eyes gathered on him as Rintarou barged in.

“What do you think you’re doing?! You’re late! The Round Table discussion was just about to start!”

“Sorry, but we’ve gotta put a pause on the conference for today.”

“What do you mean?” Luna scowled when Rintarou phrased things that way.

“Erm…we just got word from the office of the prime minister… Apparently, an ancient dragon showed up in a lake in Arizona…”

“What did you say?!”

The Curtain of Consciousness had slackened across the entire world. That was why these things were happening more often.

“Apparently, they’ve finished evacuating the residents nearby, but…it’s the same situation as always. The army can’t handle it…”

“Obviously not. How are modern-day weapons going to be any use against illusory opponents?”

“So they called us. What do you say to this quashing request?”

“Well, isn’t it obvious?!” Luna stood up. “I’m the king who will eventually rule the world! In other words, everyone on this earth is my subject! I have only once choice: to save them, as king! We’re heading out right away!”

“Heh! That’s the spirit!”

The new knights of the Round Table got out of their chairs.

“Weeell, it looks like we’ve got a huge fight ahead of us. It’s been a while since we could go all-out. I’m itching to show what I can do…” Rintarou cracked his fingers.

“Hey, wait a sec, Rintarou! Are you trying to play hooky?!” Luna suddenly grabbed Rintarou by the collar and started running.

She didn’t head toward the door, however…but to the open veranda in the back.

“Uh, wai— You… You’re not actually trying to…?!” Rintarou panicked.

“A soldier values speed! That’s just common sense!” Luna smiled fearlessly.

She planted her foot on the edge of the veranda and leaped into the sky with Rintarou in tow.

“You idiot! You realize we’re heading to America, right?! How do you expect us to take a shortcuuuuuuut?!”

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Rintarou’s scream and Luna’s delighted laugh started to grow distant.

The remaining group watched the two make their departure… and eventually, they shared forced smiles with each other.

…

The curtain to the King Arthur Succession Battle was starting to lower.

The world was starting to change because the Catastrophe had partially come upon them.

Would the Curtain of Consciousness keep collapsing and return the world to the age of myths?

Or would it reform itself and return to the way things were in the real world?

No one knew what would become of the planet or where it was headed. All they knew was that a bright future must be waiting for them…

In this world existed a king and her vassal, who made all confident that this was the truth.

Over there was yesterday in all its chaos. Here was today, radiant and colorful.

And tomorrow opened up ahead.

We reached the start of the play, of our dreams.

I watched it as I stood beside her.

Yes, she was there among the knights of the Round Table.

Together with the one they called strong, noble—*Rex quondam, Rex que futurus*—the once and future king.

Their swords sang her praises, weaving together her tale in verse.

Like a lighthouse in the night, like a torch guiding humanity.

I watched everything in the world flooding with sunlight.

Watched as I stood beside her.

AFTERWORD

Hey, it's Taro Hitsuji. We're here in Volume 5 of *Last Round Arthurs*.

I'm eternally grateful for my editor, those involved in the publishing process, and all the readers who picked up this book. Thank you!

And with that, the series has come to an end. Thank you for keeping up with Luna and Rintarou for all this time!

Wow. As the author, I feel a sense of accomplishment. I think I included all that I wanted to include. It's weird to say this myself, but this series has been dense with content!

The original pitch was for a five-volume series, so if I was going to reference Arthurian legend, I was going to have to be very selective about the things I wanted to reference. Except I had problems with the last part… since all the stories in it are just so interesting.

Taro Hitsuji: "I think I'll use a little bit of this and a little bit of that… Hmm, I'd love to include this story… Oh! I forgot about this one, which is major…! And this one… Aaaaack! This is so hard! Let's just put it all in! Hmm? What if I can't fit it in a five-volume story? That's a problem for a later time!"

That's how *Last Round Arthurs* was born—crammed with the best stories, plots, and premises of Arthurian legend. What didja think?

I want to give a huge thank you to Kiyotaka Haimura for giving life to the story with fantastic illustrations!

The Akashic Records series is still ongoing. I've got ideas in the works for new books, and I'm planning to tackle more writing to present you with some interesting stories.

I hope you'll continue to think kindly of a creature named Taro Hitsuji!

Taro Hitsuji

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